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El Dorado Hills home fees may soar for parks

A proposed 118 percent hike for rec facilities, plus road fees, could push family house prices up \$43,000.

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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A 118 percent increase has been proposed in fees for new single-family homes in much of El Dorado Hills to help provide parks and recreation facilities needed to keep pace with community growth.

The proposed park fee increase follows on the heels of a hike in traffic impact fees by the county. If the park fee is approved as proposed, the price of new homes in El Dorado Hills would have about \$43,000 tacked on for parks and roads.

The El Dorado Hills Community Services District board will hold a hearing Thursday on a study by the consulting firm Economic Planning Systems to determine the portion of new facilities costs to be assigned to new development.

The study is based on the district's 2006 Park and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, which also will be considered for adoption.

The master plan, developed with input from community surveys, focus groups and an advisory committee, represents "a very large picture of what's called for in El Dorado Hills," said district General Manager Wayne Lowery.

The 2006 plan sets the stage for a more elaborate park system, he said, adding that developers can't be expected to bear the entire cost.

The district has about 35,000 residents. The plan includes facilities for 57,100, the district's projected population in 2020.

To carry out all that is envisioned, the district will need additional funding sources, possibly including taxes or assessments requiring voter approval, Lowery said.

The park impact fee, paid at the time a building permit is issued, affects only new residences.

The consultants' study calls for increasing the fee for single-family homes in most of El Dorado Hills from \$7,073 per unit to \$15,404.

Fees are lower in the Serrano area, because developers provided parks within the planned community. The study recommends increasing fees for new homes in those neighborhoods from \$2,822 per dwelling to \$5,322.

The proposed fees reflect the changes and assumptions in the 2006 master plan, the study says. The current park impact fees do not generate the revenue necessary to meet the needs of new residents, according to the report.

The consultants cite a dramatic escalation in park construction costs as well as the challenges of the district's hilly terrain, which boost the price tag for parks.

The study also notes that the master plan reflects changes in industry standards and community desires regarding the size, scope and type of amenities and features considered typical for major recreational facilities.

In 2000, community centers generally were 10,000 to 20,000 square feet and contained large meeting or conference areas with a few smaller meeting rooms and a kitchen. Now, the report says, community center buildings range up to 50,000 square feet. In addition to meeting rooms, they often include a fitness center, gymnasium, kitchen and banquet facilities.

The study notes that the El Dorado district's 2006 master plan calls for new community centers to be at least 40,000 square feet.

The master plan, prepared by the Berkeley-based planning and design firm MIG Inc., estimates \$174 million would be required to complete the plan's capital projects, with about \$130 million eligible for funding through park impact fees.

Other funding sources include park in-lieu fees -- development fees that can be paid in cash or by donating land for parks -- as well as grants and donations.

Based on the anticipated number of housing starts, the plan estimates the district will receive in-lieu fees of \$300,000 annually in cash or land value.

The district's grant funding has been relatively low, Lowery said.

"With most of the grants we've tried to apply for, the demographics of the community make us ineligible or less competitive," he said.

Although some state park bond funds are distributed on a per capita basis, most are awarded through competitive grants geared to urban areas, Lowery said. Because El Dorado Hills is an unincorporated community in a rural county, he said, "We get labeled as rural."

The most substantial donation the district has received in the past 10 years is the El Dorado Hills Rotary Club's pledge of more than \$100,000 for the teen center in Community Park, according to the master plan.

Lowery said he thinks the district could generate more donations from businesses through a capital campaign. An endowment fund also would allow people to make bequests to the district.

Thursday's meeting will begin at 7 p.m. in the Pavilion, 1021-B Harvard Way, El Dorado Hills. Copies of the 2006 Park Impact Fee Nexus Study and the 2006 Park and Recreation Facilities Master Plan are available at the district office, 1021-C Harvard Way, and on the Web site at www.edhcsd.org.

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