



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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Draft law would give developers a break on traffic fees for some Bellingham projects

JARED PABEN - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - Developers could get up to a 50 percent break in their traffic impact fees if they meet certain criteria and standards, under a city proposal.

In 2010, developers pay \$1,932 for every evening rush hour trip their projects are expected to generate.

The amount, which is based on the dollar value of projects the city plans to do to serve new development, increased over 2009.

The new proposal is part of the Ten in '10 Initiative, in which the city plans to do 10 things this year to encourage environmentally friendly development. Bellingham-based nonprofit Sustainable Connections is working with the city on the project.

The city's comprehensive plan, which spells out how the city should grow over the next two decades, calls for much new growth in urban areas. It also aims to reduce the number of trips people take driving alone.

The proposed break on impact fees is designed to achieve those goals.

"We're trying to reward developers who are doing the development that our comprehensive plan calls for," said transportation planner Chris Comeau.

Here's the proposal:

Urban village area: Developers automatically get a 15 percent break on fees if they build in one of the following "urban village" areas: downtown, Fairhaven, Old Town, Samish Way, Fountain District or Barkley Village.

Proximity to transit: They get a break on fees depending on how close to a transit line they are, as well as the type of transit line. The break ranges from 2 percent to 10 percent. They get the break up to a distance of a-quarter mile from a transit line.

Trip-reduction plans: Businesses required by state law (those with 100 or more employees) to participate in a commute trip reduction plan get a 10 percent break in the fee.

If other developers buy all employees or residents bus passes for two years, they also get breaks equal to 1 percent for every resident or employee. Businesses that include a car-share program could also get breaks.

"They can theoretically end up saving thousands of dollars by committing to these performance measures," Comeau said.

Traffic impacts can make or break a project, especially commercial developments, said Perry Eskridge, government affairs director for the Whatcom County Association of Realtors.

"I think that's phenomenal," Eskridge said when first told of the proposal. "I didn't expect something so logical to come from the city."

From the standpoint of affordable housing, anything that reduces costs for a developer, who can pass the savings down to consumers, is a good thing, he said.

A meeting with members of the development community is scheduled for Oct. 26. Then, the city's Transportation Commission is scheduled to consider it Nov. 9.

The City Council will consider it Dec. 6. Officials hope to have the law in place by the new year.

A staff report with detailed information will be available after Nov. 1. People can e-mail Comeau at Ccomeau@cob.org and ask to be put on a list for the staff report, or they can visit Public Works administration in City Hall after Nov. 1 to obtain a copy.

ATTEND THE MEETING

What: Sustainable Connections will host a forum aimed at members of the development community to discuss a proposal to reduce traffic-impact fees if developments meet certain standards.

The general public will have an opportunity to comment to city leaders, who must approve any law, at a later hearing.

When: 4 to 5:15 Tuesday, Oct. 26

Where: Sustainable Connections, 1701 Ellis St., Suite 221

Details: See [this page at sustainableconnections.org](#).

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