

**CALLED MEETING, MAYOR AND COUNCIL, CITY OF COVINGTON, GEORGIA, COUNCIL ROOM, NOVEMBER 27, 2023, 6:30 PM.**

Mayor Steve Horton presided with Mayor Pro-tem Anthony Henderson, Council members: Susie Keck, Fleeta Baggett, and Don T. Floyd, City Manager Tres Thomas, Deputy City Manager John King, City Clerk Audra M. Gutierrez, and City Attorney Frank Turner, Jr. present. Council member Kenneth Morgan attended via teleconference. Council member Charika Davis was absent.

Mayor Horton called the meeting to order at 6:42 PM.

Mayor Horton gave invocation and led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Mr. Jeff Bishop was in attendance to discuss the Downtown Consumption District. Mr. Bishop stated outside consumption should end and not be renewed. Mr. Bishop further stated if it becomes permanent, what will be next.

Mr. Billy Fortson was in attendance to state he is in support of Impact Fees but believes they should be reasonable and competitive. Mr. Fortson further stated the proposed fee schedule is not reasonable and will kill business. Mr. Fortson suggested making the fees equal to Newton County's.

Newton County Chamber President Debbie Harper stated the Chamber has 650 members and she is in support of impact fees, at a lower rate. Ms. Harper further stated the restaurant component is confusing.

Mr. Randy Vinson stated Land Use Categories should be considered when charging impact fees and needs to be tailored.

Ms. Barbara Morgan agreed with Mr. Vinson's statement. Ms. Morgan stated the current proposed ordinance will hurt multi-million developments wanting to build within the City.

Mayor Horton informed the audience there were many public discussions of impact fees.

Mr. Fortson stated he was not aware of any fee schedule being discussed.

The City Manager stated there have been discussions of 100%, 90%, and 80% of maximum allowed fees, etc.

Council member Floyd stated there is some confusion regarding whether the fees could be negotiated. Council member Floyd further stated he recommends not charging the maximum.

Council member Henderson left the meeting at 7:07 PM.

Mr. Fortson stated not only is the impact fees for restaurants too high, the fee for Publix would have been over \$2.5 million.

Mayor Horton stated these fees take in account the number of vehicles these businesses serve.

Council member Henderson returned at 7:09 PM.

The City Attorney stated the fees are tied to car trips, hotels by the room, dwellings by the unit, and all others are by the square foot.

Council member Keck recommended removing retail, restaurant, entertainment, and grocery stores.

The City Attorney stated according to state law, you cannot pick and choose who you charge.

Council member Keck stated Newton County does not charge any commercial impact fees.

Planning & Zoning Director Judy Johnson stated the county did not charge commercial, whether it was vetted, she is not sure. Ms. Johnson further stated Newton County is going through a re-assessment now.

The City Attorney stated he would have to check into the matter.

Council member Keck stated she would like to look at charging 60% on residential and not charging retail, restaurant, entertainment, and grocery stores.

Council member Morgan recommended charging a flat rate instead on square footage.

Council member Henderson stated he asked the consultant if he compared the City's proposed fees to Newton County's and he believed he did not.

Council member Keck stated Newton County does not offer the same services as the City. Council member Keck further stated the fees were compared to other Cities.

Council member Morgan asked for a comparison between Covington and Walton County.

Council member Baggett stated she found the problem with flat rates is they are not equal. Council member Baggett further stated we need to look a percentage. Council member Baggett recommended 50%.

Mr. Sam Hay stated he thinks the 25% - 50% would be in excess of Newton County and Walton County.

Mayor Horton stated Newton County enacted impact fees in 2005 and inflation is higher now than it was 3 years ago. Mayor Horton further stated the volume of impact in Covington is greater than the impact out in the county. Mayor Horton stated if we do not get this reasonably accurate, someone has to pay for this and the property owners should not have to subsidize the growth.

Council member Morgan stated we cannot compare Covington to rural areas; we need to compromise.

Council member Keck stated Walton County has a population of 80,000, Newton County 114,000, and Covington 15,000. Council member Keck further stated Covington is experiencing all of the growth so it does not make sense to compare to Walton County.

Council member Baggett stated Covington provides services that the county does not provide. Council member Baggett further stated the box unit apartments are a detriment to the City. Council member Baggett stated we need to look at between 20% - 50%.

Mr. Sam Hay stated he thinks we need to compare like municipalities.

Council member Morgan asked legal can City set the fee at 25% and look at it in 2-3 years decrease the fee based on the revenue received.

The City Attorney stated council can modify the ordinance in two readings.

Council member Keck stated other governments have raised their fees, not lowered them.

Mayor Horton stated he sees nothing lower than 25%.

Council member Baggett asked to see the numbers for 35%.

Council member Floyd stated he would be very leery of “negotiations,” for example donating land for a fire station and the land not being suitable.

1. Motion made by Council member Keck, seconded by Council member Henderson to approve the **first** reading of an ordinance for the City of Covington setting Impact Fees at 35% of maximum:

“AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF COVINGTON, GEORGIA, TO AMEND THE COVINGTON MUNICIPAL CODE, ENACTED AND ADOPTED ON THE 16<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF OCTOBER, 2001, AS AMENDED BY PREVIOUS AMENDMENTS, TO ALTER CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF TITLE 15 OF THE SAID CODE OF ORDINANCES FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADOPTING **CHAPTER 15.52 (DEVELOPMENT IMPACT FEES)**; TO REPEAL CONFLICTING ORDINANCES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.”

Motion carried with Council members Keck, Baggett, Floyd, and Henderson voting in favor. Council member Morgan voting against.

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Being no further business meeting adjourned at 7:52 PM.

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Steve Horton, Mayor

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Audra M. Gutierrez, City Clerk