By Jan Schultz
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Further study and likely a new recommendation will come before the city council on reimbursing tap fees for new construction in Imperial.

At last week's council meeting, a Citizens' Advisory Committee recommendation to reimburse water/sewer tap fees up to $5,000 for new rental properties was set aside by the council in favor of what seems like an expansion of the committee's suggestion.

The discussion was started by a request from Russ Pankonin of Imperial for reimbursement of those tap fees for a new rental duplex he plans to build at 13th and Grant Sts.

At the council's July 16 meeting, Pankonin said with the lack of rental housing here, adding new rentals could be considered an economic development effort.

At the July meeting, council member Doug Gaswick said the city has other incentive programs for business start-ups or expansions, and do so because of economic development.

Johna Jablonski, representing the Citizens Advisory Committee, reviewed their recommendations:

1) Provide up to $5,000 per tap fee (water and sewer) for any new rental property. Anticipate requesting $50,000 annually for a potential 10 projects each year.

2) Property receiving waived fees must be used as a rental for five years.

3) Propose using city sales tax proceeds vs. utility department funds for the tap fee reimbursement.

4) The program would start immediately.

Jablonski said the committee would like to revisit the program and see how it's working after six months.

Council member John Arterburn said he doesn't think the proposed program should be limited to rentals.

"Anybody that builds a house is still adding to the stock and supply of housing in this community," he said.

Arterburn even said commercial businesses should be added to the equation, too, as that is also economic development.

Mayor Dwight Coleman also suggested a starting and ending date be established for such a program if it is approved.

Jablonski and Leslie Carlholm, the city's community development director, suggested the issue go back to the Citizens Advisory Committee for another recommendation.

Residential tap fees for water/sewer generally run about $3,000.

Other council business

- After a review with Director Sandra Palmer, the 2012-13 budget for the Imperial senior services—Imperial Manor and Parkview/Heights—was approved. The total operating expenditures for the Manor and Parkview/Heights in the coming year totals $3,442,097 plus $95,185 for capital expenditures. As in the past, no property tax dollars are requested to support

the budget. Within the budget is a $119,735 payment to RHD for managing the facilities, up from $107,239 for 2011-12. The variance, questioned at a recent council meeting, was because 13 months of the fee were paid in the 2010-11 budget versus 11 the past year, so the increase looks larger than the 3 percent annual increase RHD is contracted to receive, said Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland. RHD's fee includes salary for the director. While the Manor's day care operation showed a loss the past year, Palmer said they are budgeting to break even in 2012-13 in anticipation of an average of 60 youths per day. One of the capital improvements in the budget for 2012-13 is replacement of the parking area to the east of the buildings. An estimate from Koellner Enterprises of $51,990.90 had been acquired by maintenance supervisor Billie Hayes, Palmer said, to remove the asphalt and replace it all with concrete. But, the council indicated bids need to be acquired since the city is required to do so for projects over $30,000. Palmer asked that sales tax funds be used for the parking lot project. No action was taken on the request.

- Annexing an estimated five to seven acres of land owned by Steve and Deborah Schilke, just west of the Titan Machinery building, is being pursued by the city, as well as the extension of water and sewer services to the property. The Schilkes requested the extension of services and annexation of that corner bordering Highway 6 for a planned winery. The council approved the utility extension before the annexation process is completed as long as a signed agreement was received from the Schilkes that they agree to annexation.
- City staff will have some additional time to schedule a hearing when requested by a property owner who has been notified of a possible nuisance violation. Previously the code allowed just a 14-day time span to set that hearing after the city was notified the property owner requested one. Now, there will be up to 30 days allowed to schedule the hearing, after the council passed a resolution 4-0. The council also met with West Central Nebraska Development District (WCNDD) in special session Monday this week to discuss additional criteria or changes in the city's nuisance abatement program.
- On a recommendation from members of the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department (IVFD), Josh Moreno was approved on a 4-0 vote as a new member of the IVFD.
- Salary for new police officer Spencer Rowley was formally approved at $32,500. The council passed a new wage ordinance adding Rowley to the employee wage schedule.