



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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MEMORANDUM

February 4, 2009

Re: Summary of proposed changes to the Department fee schedule for 2009

Background

This correspondence is to inform you of a proposed revision to the Planning & Development Services fee schedule and to solicit your comments, both for and against the proposal. Please send your comments to me via mail or email, and feel free to call me if you have questions. My direct phone line is 360-419-3456.

A public hearing is scheduled for March 3rd, and will be broadcast live on Skagit 21, which you can watch on the county website. Our sessions are normally scheduled to start at 8 am, occasionally at a later time.

The Main Story

Planning & Development Services strives to balance different measurements of our value to the community.

Project applicants expect value through predictable and reasonable application of the codes, good service and appropriate fees for our services.

The community measures our value by how well we protect its vision of appropriate land use, how well we protect the natural environment and by how well we protect personal life and property. The community also expects us to act responsibly with our finances.

The County Commissioners provide public policy and direction for county programs and how they are administered. Planning & Development Services is partially funded by the general fund, and all the remaining business operation expenses are offset by land use and permit revenues.

Planning & Development Services (PDS) has already responded to the current economic situation by addressing expenses. PDS reduced the 2009 expense budget by staff reductions. While this is no time to raise revenues in general, it is an appropriate time to adjust a few fees where experience shows us that the cost of services greatly exceeds the revenue received from applications or general fund allocations.

Building Permits and Associated Fees

Title Eliminations for manufactured homes are a WA State Dept of Licensing function, but require permit verification and a sign-off from this department. The current fee of \$25 does not cover our

time, which includes research and updating any permit records. The new fee is \$50 for Title Eliminations with a completed permit, \$120 without a completed permit.

Fire Marshal review. This new fee of \$50 is to offset part of the cost incurred by the Fire Marshal's office performing Fire Code review, and the revenue will go to that department. The general fund has borne all of the cost until now.

Mechanical and Plumbing Permit fees have not changed since 1997. The current base fee of \$23.50 does not cover the cost of permitting and inspections. The base fee is changing to \$50. The fees per fixture or per appliance will not change. A basic, stand-alone residential mechanical permit for gas piping and a new furnace would change from \$43.80 to \$70.30. The \$70 provides permit administration and two or more inspections. Mechanical and plumbing permits issued as part of a building combination permit, as in the case of a new home, will not be affected by the change in the base fee.

Environmental Review and Land Use Fees

PDS favors a fee schedule with fees defined by the scope of the project, such as building permit fees based on a value per square foot or land division fees based on the type of division and the number of lots. This method provides more certainty for applicants and relieves us of the burden of monthly billing. Occasionally, projects vary greatly in scope from the norm, and PDS is not compensated for the extra time and effort. Rather than change the fees for everyone, we have added **hourly review fees** for certain land use activities, indicated by an asterisk on the fee schedule. The base fee is based on an hourly rate of \$120 per hour. Additional fees for hourly review in excess of the base fee will be invoiced on a monthly basis. The list includes Comprehensive Plan Amendments, Lot Certifications, Rezones, Shoreline Variances, Shorelines Conditional Uses, Shorelines Map Amendments and Special Uses.

The **Critical Areas fee** has been a flat fee of \$300, whether it was for a residential deck or a long plat. The revenue failed to pay for the minimum staff necessary to do the work, especially for large projects like land divisions. The new \$600 fee is designed to assign the cost of general critical areas property assessment or land division review to those projects, so the rest can remain the same.

Enforcement Fees

Planning Violations and Shorelines Violations require extra work by our staff to get from start to finish. It is appropriate to reduce this cost to the general public by assessing penalties.

Legal Publication Costs

Rising costs force us to raise this fee from \$50 to \$100 per publication. It would not apply to the construction of a single family residence.