

Having sufficient parkland and a variety of recreation activities are important in making Evansville a great place to live and play. The City Code includes a requirement that new residential subdivisions dedicate land for future park development. This way we can make sure we maintain sufficient parkland even as we grow as a community.

With development on the city's westside in the early/mid 2000's, we required parkland dedication. With some additional property purchased by the city, this became the aptly-named, fifteen-acre Westside Park.

With subsequent developments on the city's eastside, to the north, and additional development on the westside, the city waived the required land dedication and instead accepted fees in lieu of parkland. The fees allowed improvements such as parking lot, soccer fields, playground, and shelter with restrooms at the Westside Park. Additional improvements are planned as additional fees are collected.

Actually, with these subsequent developments building in phases, the ledgers are running in the red, since the costs of the improvements have outpaced the fees collected to date. But they should catch up as future phases open for housing.

But things have been fairly quiet since the Great Recession, and we have not reviewed our fees in lieu of parkland in several years. This was partly due to the economy taking pressure out of the development market. It was also partly due to waiting out several changes in the state law regarding parkland fees in 2005 and 2007.

Parkland Dedication

Our parkland dedication requires each single-family lot to dedicate 2,000 square feet for and each multifamily or high density residential unit to dedicate 1,000 square feet. These are minimums with the Plan Commission authorized to determine additional acreage necessary for dedication. And parkland dedications will typically not be less than two acres.

The Plan Commission may require that the dedication at a suitable place on the edge of the subdivision so that additional land may be added when the neighboring land is later developed. The developer will dedicate all such recreation areas as a condition of the final subdivision plat approval and show it as parkland directly on the plat.

Each dedication shall be of suitable size, dimension, topography and general character and shall have a minimum of a twenty-foot wide service access. Land dedicated for park and recreation purposes shall not be used to fulfill any stormwater management needs. And the area dedicated shall be seeded according to city specifications.

The location of the parkland dedication (as with the residential subdivision itself) needs to be consistent with the city's comprehensive plan.

Fees In Lieu of Parkland

When the Plan Commission determines that the dedication of land would not be consistent with the comprehensive plan or the amount of land available for dedication is less than what is required, the developer shall pay a fee in lieu of land dedication proportional to the need for acquisition or initial improvement of land for public parks. The City Council may reduce the fee or area dedication requirements if it finds that such requirements are discriminatory or create a hardship as approved to the particular development.

When the city first began accepting fees in lieu of parkland in the late 1990's, the fee was based on the assessed value for land in the city and was to be reviewed annually. Later the city began using a three-year average when looking at the assessed land value.

In the decade between 1997 and 2006, our fee in lieu of parkland increased an average of 8.4% per year. However, the increase varied from year to year with a low of 2.2% (in 2002) and a high of 31.9% (in 2006). Although we have talked about them a couple of times, the city has not raised the fees since 2006 due to the Great Recession's impact on housing development.

Currently the fees are \$775.38 per single-family lot and \$581.45 per multi-family unit. All fees in lieu of parkland are to provide for the acquisition or initial improvement (not maintenance) of land for public parks and for no other purpose.

Future Development

It has been some years since the city adjusted its fees in lieu of parkland, and there are signs that the housing market is beginning to pick up. I expect the Plan Commission and City Council to review the fees in the next couple months. (I'm even using this column as a memo to the Plan Commission on March 3 and to the Finance Committee on March 6).

Questions for the city to consider obviously include the amount of the fee itself. This will likely involve a discussion of how to calculate the fee such that it is reasonable to the value of land and to cover the expense of new park improvements. It will also likely include a discussion of when the fee should be imposed; that is, when the land is platted or when individual building permits are issued.

And it will include a review of the city's recently adopted 2013-2018 Park and Outdoor Recreation Plan. This will help with making sure that parkland locations meet development needs and that fees are proportional to the costs of improvements.