

Watsonville has the lowest building fees in the county

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WATSONVILLE — If you're looking to pay the lowest building fees in Santa Cruz County, come to Watsonville.

According to a recent report of building and school-impact fees compiled by the Watsonville city planning department, Watsonville has the least expensive building fees in the county, while the unincorporated part of the county has by far the costliest.

The City Council had requested the survey because they "just wanted to see where we are in relation to other cities," said Planning Director Bud Carney.

Some council members have complained that building fees are too high, but the survey indicates otherwise.

The report will be considered by the City Council at its Tuesday meeting.

The survey compared nine

jurisdictions in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties on charges assessed a 1,500 square-foot home with a 500 square-foot garage on a 7,000 square-foot lot in an urban subdivision.

Not all cities in Monterey County charge the \$2,250 school-impact fees, according to the survey. In fact, of the cities that were surveyed in Monterey County, only Salinas tacked on the special fee. But school fees are attached to every home built in Santa Cruz County, raising the pre-construction price of housing.

The legislature passed Assembly Bill 2926 last year allowing schools to impose the special fees on new construction. They are charged at a rate of \$1.50 a square foot, and the money goes toward new construction and rehabilitation of school facilities.

If building fees are excluded, then Marina, in Monterey County, is the cheapest place to build of the areas surveyed, costing just \$3,485.

Watsonville is second, at \$5,095.

Adding school-impact fees, cities rank as follows, vis-a-vis building fees:

- Marina: \$3,485.
- Monterey city: \$5,326.
- Seaside: \$5,620.
- Watsonville: \$5,095, plus school-impact fees, for a total of \$7,345.
- Santa Cruz city: \$5,752, plus school-impact fees, for \$8,002.
- Salinas: \$5,870, plus school-impact fees, for \$8,120.
- Scotts Valley: \$7,905 plus school-impact fees, for \$10,155.
- Capitola: \$8,505 plus school-impact fees, for \$10,735.
- Santa Cruz County: \$13,962, plus school-impact fees, for \$16,212.

Carney pointed out that the fees represent the worst-case scenario because many of the major public works fees, such as water hookup fees and storm drain fees, are paid by the subdivider and are not collected a second time when the actual building permits are submitted.