

CACs would help growth pay for growth, says Sparrow

Township councillor urges colleagues to consider including a community amenity contribution in developers' fees

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Michelle Sparrow

The Township of Langley could be “leaving money on the table” when it comes to funding new community amenities by not implementing a development fee already used in neighbouring municipalities, says Coun. Michelle Sparrow.



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On Jan. 25, Sparrow presented a motion to council asking staff to create a report on charging community amenity contributions (CACs) to developers building new homes. Separate from development cost charges (DCCs), which pay for off-site services such as water and sewer, CACs are used for recreation facilities, parks, libraries, police, fire and road infrastructure. There are some in place already to fund greenways, but Sparrow believes they are not being used to their full potential.

The motion received mixed reaction from council, who voted to send the idea to the Council Priorities Committee for more in-depth discussion.

"Our growth is not currently paying for our growth," Sparrow said.

"And as our sustainability charter states, looking for new non-taxation funding sources is something that we have indicated as being an important part of growing our community and I think that CACs have been used successfully in other communities."

Sparrow cites Surrey as an example, where planners "work backwards" by looking at what the new community will need, such as a park, and dividing that cost by the number of units to be built.

DCCs, by comparison, can only be used for the acquisition of park land, but not its completion. This is evident at Yorkson Community Park, where Sparrow says it could be a decade before there is enough funding to finish it.

"It's residents in our community, it's their best interests and what is best for the community versus developer's pocketbooks," she said.

"It's not massive amounts of money, it's small contributions that add up to a large lump sum that can then be used to better the community."

There are risks involved, though, as CACs can affect affordability of homes, with costs being passed on to the buyer.

This can weed out smaller developers who may not be able to afford the extra costs.

Coun. Charlie Fox said the last time council discussed CACs was in 2009, and noted that DCCs have contributed \$70 million to Aldergrove for sewers and water in the past four years.

He also cautioned council about making too many comparisons to Surrey, or Maple Ridge, where similar CAC discussions are being held, saying the uniqueness of the Township will have to be taken into account.

"We have to be a little bit careful about that balance between infrastructure and community amenities," he said.

"And I think we can only gain that through a discussion. First through understanding, second through a discussion and thirdly through developing policy that is applicable strictly to the Township of Langley."