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City fees may rise

Report recommends increases for planning services, impounded pets, police services.

By **Brianna Bailey**

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Newport Beach should be charging residents about \$5.6 million more per year in fees on everything from building permits to adult softball programs, according to the findings of a new city-commissioned study.

The study also found Newport recovers less of its costs for things like planning department services and police protection than many similar-sized cities in the state.

While Newport has raised fees here and there over the years, the new study is the first time the city has taken a comprehensive look at how much residents should pay for what services in more than a decade, said Newport Beach City Manager Homer Bludau.

"A lot has happened since then," Bludau said. "Unless you really stay on top of [fees] and look at it each year, it can easily get way behind after 10 years."

The city's costs to keep things running have jumped from \$86 million in 2001 to \$132 million in 2007, according to information from the Newport Beach City Council finance committee.

To catch up with its costs, the city could look at raising fees on things like building permits and adult recreation programs, Bludau said.

Among other findings, the study recommended raising fees for impounding dogs and cats from \$35 to \$107. The study also recommended raising prices for numerous planning department fees. Recommended increases include increasing the price of a planning department appeals board hearing from \$887 to \$3,070.

Talk of raising the price for some city services is never popular, and the city also will have to look at its costs before making a decision to raise fees, said Councilwoman Leslie Daigle, a member of Newport's finance committee.

"Because the city has not been reviewing our fees on a regular basis, when a fee increase occurs, it becomes an emotionally charged issue," Daigle said.

The study also recommends Newport recover more of what it spends on police services, something Bludau doesn't think would be a good idea.

"The police are never going to be something that comes close to paying for itself. We don't have police to make money," he said.

Newport only recovers about 22% of its costs for police services, which is well below what most other communities in California recover, according to the study.

Redlands recovers 79% of what it spends on police in fees for things like concealed weapons permits and impounding animals.

Huntington Beach recovers 69% of its costs for police through such fees, according to the study.

Based on the findings of the study, city officials also could look at lowering some fees, said Councilman Keith Curry, also a member of the fiance committee.

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The study also recommends fees for things like security alarm applications and building department appeal hearings.

How much of its money the city recovers through fees varies greatly from service to service, according to the study.

An analysis of city planning department fees alone found money recovered from flat service fees ranged from 3% for off-site parking agreements to 299% for Christmas tree and pumpkin lot permits.

One of the things city officials will look at when deciding whether to raise fees is the fairness of the charge, Curry said.

"There's a lot of things we charge fees for and we need to be careful to make sure we're fair and equitable to all of our residents," he said.

WHAT DO

YOU THINK?

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BRIANNA BAILEY may be reached at (714) 966-4625 or at brianna.bailey@latimes.com.