

I'm Mike Phillips with First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio and a leader with COPS/Metro Alliance. We believe City Council should consider the history of Impact Fees, dating back to the 1970s when the congregations of Communities Organized for Public Service, or C.O.P.S., sought fairness in the assessment of such fees.

Then in 1989, our friend and colleague, the late Rev. Homer Bain of Colonial Hills United Methodist Church, led a newly formed Metro Alliance, along with C.O.P.S., in a series of meetings with SAWS and congregations all over town. As a result of those interfaith conversations, in 1990 SAWS adopted realistic Impact Fees for new water and sewage hookups—fees that more closely reflected actual costs.

Some developers then pressured the State Legislature to limit those fees with a statewide cap. Because of this cap, these fees still do not reflect the actual costs we all bear for new development.

The main reason COPS/Metro took on this effort 35 years ago was fairness. It is the same issue before us today. Our COPS/Metro leaders have always supported smart growth and development. Subsidizing endless suburban sprawl is neither fair nor smart. Developers should be free to build on the city's fringe and families free to buy there; but those who build and buy there should not expect low-income and inner-city ratepayers to subsidize their choice. We will make better decisions about growth and development if our personal cost/benefit analysis reflects the full costs of our decisions. As COPS/Metro leaders we again ask the questions: Who benefits? And who pays?

Some developers say that higher impact and water supply fees will hurt future homeowners because the costs will be passed on in the price of a new house. We argue that with fair and realistic impact fees more families will choose not to live or build on the outskirts of town. They will instead create a demand for other alternatives, such as lower cost infill developments.

Our City Council has the responsibility to keep our entire population's interests in mind. Unfortunately, current inner-city ratepayers, many of whom are low-income families, are still subsidizing the true cost of expanding our water and sewer system—which now extends beyond our county lines. In fairness, the full, actual costs of these new hook-ups should be more closely calculated and reflected in our fee schedule.

If Council chooses to protect the profit of developers by keeping impact fees artificially low, they will harm SAWS' budget—and our city budget as a result—and they will force the average San Antonio family to pay even higher water bills beyond the already anticipated 5% or more annual increases over the next few years. A vote against SAWS recommendation is like telling your constituents that you don't care if their water rates rise, you just want to give the developers and new home builders a great big break.

We don't need to fight this fight again. Those of us who knew Rev. Bain understand this to be a matter of fairness and justice. We urge the City Council to uphold a longstanding community precedent and vote for justice. A vote for the recommendation by the SAWS Board and staff to increase the fees up to the allowed state cap would get us closer to fairness and justice.