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Article published May 23, 2007

## Sarasota County eyes more impact fees

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**SARASOTA COUNTY** -- Sarasota County's impact fees could become the second most expensive in the state by the end of the summer.

The county recently approved two rounds of impact fee hikes that will raise the fees, which are one-time taxes on building, to more than \$19,600 for a 2,000-square-foot home by June 2008.

A possible third round of hikes, this time to help pay for schools, could make Sarasota second only to Collier County, which charges more than \$30,000 to build a 2,000-square-foot home.

School officials will discuss within two months the possibility of raising school impact fees, Superintendent Gary Norris said Tuesday. He said the school district is awaiting a consultant's report that "will no doubt show" justification for raising fees.

Builders say the impact fee hikes come at a dangerous time for the construction and real estate industries.

Affordable housing will suffer if the county raises the fees, which now total \$10,637 for a 2,000-square-foot home, to more than \$20,000, said Wayne Farrell, President of Southwest Florida Homes, Inc.

"We have a housing market in Sarasota that has fallen off the table. And to make such severe impact fee adjustments right now is certainly not helping stimulate the recovery," Farrell said.

School and county officials have disagreed. The school impact fees were adopted in 2004 because "revenues were insufficient to meet the school board's capital improvement needs," a county ordinance reads.

The County Commission would have to approve any changes to the impact fees. The commission could discuss, but will not vote on, school impact fees today. Commissioners are also scheduled to discuss the way school impact fees are assessed in large residential developments.

Ken Marsh, school district director of long-range planning, said it is too early to say how much impact fees could increase. The school fees account for about \$2,000 of the county's \$10,637 in impact fees.

How much the school impact fees increase could depend on changes to construction costs and enrollment.

"Right now, the costs are going up but the enrollment projections are moderating," Marsh said.

At least a third of the state's 67 counties, including Manatee and Lee, have school impact fees. Charlotte County plans to implement a school impact fee in January 2008.

Manatee County increased its total impact fees to about \$21,000 last year.

Charlotte's are about \$8,000, according to a report by Texas consulting firm Duncan Associates.

### ALSO ON THE COMMISSION AGENDA

Water management

County Commissioners will consider management plans for Big Pass, New Pass and Venice Inlet.

Voting systems

The Citizens Advisory Committee on Voting Systems will make a presentation about the county's plan to phase out electronic voting. The committee is expected to recommend the county rent optical-scan voting machines until the 2008 election cycle is over.

Bar ban

The county might vote on a plan to ban people under 21 from bars and nightclubs.

The state average is just under \$9,000, the Duncan Associate report states.

The report said that Sarasota County had the fourth highest impact fees in the state as of March.

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