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EDITORIAL

Helping pay for schools

Our position: It makes sense for Seminole to raise impact fee, impose automatic hikes.

July 28, 2007

In 1992, Seminole County imposed an impact fee on new development to help pay for school construction. Since then building costs have risen sharply, but the impact fee is stuck at the same level.

Seminole's School Board has proposed raising the fee and adopting an "escalator" to tie future increases to construction costs. It's a reasonable approach that deserves support from county commissioners.

Under the board's proposal, the current fee of \$1,384 per new single-family home would rise to \$5,609 -- still less than school impact fees elsewhere in Central Florida. The escalator would raise the fee in the future based on increases in building costs, but annual hikes would be capped at 3 percent. At least a half-dozen other Florida counties use a similar approach for school impact fees.

Seminole's School Board needed more than a year for study and meetings to draft its proposal. Forcing the board to go through the same protracted process for every future increase would guarantee more delays and sticker shock.

Seminole's overall school enrollment declined last year and is expected to dip this year. But some parts of the county, such as Oviedo, are still seeing more students. The board has redrawn school-boundary zones, but the state requirement to reduce class sizes limits that approach for coping with overcrowding. And projections show overall enrollment going back up again in the future.

Impact fees are intended to cover the costs of growth. It only makes sense to raise them as those costs increase.

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