

To fit all the kids, fees must fit schools' need

A Times Editorial

Published August 1, 2007

Of all the unresolved details that surround school concurrency - a bureaucratic term meaning there is an open desk at the local school for your kid when you move into the county - the biggest item is last on the list. That is where you'll see the bottom line.

Who pays for access management: the road to the school and off-site improvements, the sidewalks and traffic signals that guide vehicles and pedestrians to and from new schools?

Those arguments between the school district and Pasco County can become so disagreeable that a proposed contract, called an interlocal agreement, between the two bodies includes a conflict-resolution provision.

Translation: the arguments aren't over yet.

More notably, however, the bigger bottom line suggested Monday at a workshop attended by the Pasco School Board, superintendent, county commissioners, city representatives and their staffs is \$6,121. That is the proposed increase in the school impact fee charged for each new home.

The money is needed to help the district achieve a five-year, and in some instances 10-year, construction plan of schools around the county to ensure elementary and middle schools are no more than 15 percent overcapacity and high schools are even less crowded. By comparison, Wesley Chapel Elementary is projected to be at double capacity next year with 1,240 children attending a school built for 618. Across the county, J.W. Mitchell High School will be 28 percent above capacity with 2,583 students in a building designed for 1,938.

It means three new high schools, three middle schools, up to 10 elementary schools and additions at some existing buildings to ease current crowding and to allow room for the influx of students that is expected to continue despite Hillsborough County's declining student population. Both the Florida Department of Education and Pasco School District project the student population here to grow to roughly 76,000 by 2012 from 63,000 in the close of the past school year.

And the new state concurrency laws require space to be available for new students or else the county can deny developers permission to build homes.

Financing includes a \$110-million state-permitted bond issue, local property taxes, state aid, the local sales tax and impact fees charged to each new home. The fee now is \$4,356 for a single-family home, but it is proposed to increase to \$10,477. Beginning Oct. 1, the county already will charge a higher transportation impact fee of \$9,500 per single-family home.

The building industry's immediate objections were not unexpected, particularly in light of the slowdown in construction

permits. There will be much debate over the next six months as the concurrency requirements and the impact fee are digested by citizen advisory groups, home builders, municipal governments, and county commissioners. The interlocal agreements must be approved by Feb. 1.

Clearly, however, the need to increase the impact fee can't be ignored. It remains one of those rare funding sources that can be controlled locally.

The development community may not like it, but passing through a more expensive school impact fee to their customers sure beats the alternative: a building moratorium attributed to overcrowded schools.

© 2007 • All Rights Reserved • St. Petersburg Times
490 First Avenue South • St. Petersburg, FL 33701 • 727-893-8111
[Contact the Times](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Standard of Accuracy](#) | [Terms, Conditions & Copyright](#)