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District approves impact fees

The Charlotte County School Board approved a resolution Tuesday to partner with Punta Gorda and the Charlotte County Commission to implement impact fees

Charlotte County Public Schools will move forward with its impact-fee plan to offset costs for future growth, despite opposition from area builders.

The School Board voted unanimously Tuesday to partner with Punta Gorda and the Charlotte County Commission to implement impact fees. Chairwoman Andrea Messina was absent.

In the coming weeks, attorneys from the county and district will review the documents before the plan is voted on by the commission.

Impact fees are a one-time tax assessed on construction of new homes.

The purpose is to offset costs associated with a family moving to the area, since most schools already are overcrowded. Officials estimate more than 15 percent of the district's 17,500 students are housed in portable classrooms.

If approved, the fees would cost residents \$3,159.52 for a new, single-family home. The cost for a multifamily housing unit would be \$998.32, and \$526.59 for a mobile home. It could take effect as early as Jan. 1, 2008.

The School Board will assess 50 percent of the calculated rates next year in hopes the real estate markets recovers. The other 50 percent would take effect in 2009.

Several area builders felt the fees would only make the sluggish industry worse, since the cost would be passed on to buyers.

Ron Hill, representing the DeSoto/Charlotte Building Industry Association, said he worries because most residents finance their home over a span of years, and the tax would collect interest.

"My concern with the impact fee is we're going after new construction," he said.

The district will use the fees as part of its capital plan to fund expansion projects and relieve student capacity issues.

Gayler said the district has maxed-out other revenue streams, and is preparing for future growth.

"You never want to disagree with such an important part of the community, but sometimes you have philosophical differences," he said. "I understand the concern."

Officials will forward the documents to the County Commission for negotiation.

The ordinance incorporates language from the county's current measure for impact fees.

Charlotte County will get 1 percent of the money collected to administer the ordinance, although the rate is pending discussion.

How they voted: impact fees resolution

* Andrea Messina: absent

* Lee Swift: yes

* Sue Sifrit: yes

* Barbara Rendell: yes

* Alleen Miller: yes

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