



## Barrow considers adopting impact fees

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WINDER — Barrow County is investigating the possibility of charging impact fees to developers, money that could help the county pay for water, sewer or recreation needs for new homes. Impact fees are charged by more than 30 city and county governments in the state and are designed to defray the cost of providing services to new residents.

They can be collected to help pay for water, wastewater, stormwater, police and fire facilities, roads and bridges, libraries, parks and recreation, 911 and emergency medical service infrastructure. Annaka Woodruff, a representative from the Department of Community Affairs, explained the purpose of the fees and requirements to participate to Barrow County commissioners and staff members at a work session on Thursday.

The fees are not a method to slow growth, she said, but a way to help communities afford new residents.

"It's a way to level the playing field between local governments and developers," she said.

In the past, the county has been asking developers to give land for schools or fire stations. The implementation of impact fees would keep developers from being surprised by requests when they ask for property to be rezoned.

Planning Director Guy Herring said he thinks impact fees are the best way to manage the cost of growth countywide. Now, he said, current taxpayers are bearing the burden of growth.

If impact fees are charged, developers will share in the cost of paving roads or building a new sewer plant.

Some of the stipulations regarding impact fees, Woodruff said, include the fact that the money collected must be spent within six years, must be used for projects that would benefit the people the money is collected from and cannot be used to fund personnel or maintenance.

Additionally, the county must have an adequate level of service in areas where it is going to charge impact fees before those fees can be spent to improve services.

Commission Chairman Doug Garrison said he wanted commissioners to have the opportunity to ask questions and soak in information about impact fees before they voted on whether or not to allow them. District 4 Commissioner Isaiah Berry said the most difficult part of an impact fee conversation would be deciding what to spend the money on.

District 6 Commissioner Ben Hendrix said he thinks the fees have merit, but whether or not to collect them is something the commission must decide on as a body.

"On the surface, I'm on the bandwagon," he said. "But I don't think we need to go into the thing with blinders on. It's good information to digest."

Hendrix said he would talk to county residents about the idea and contact some of the governments who are already charging the fees to help him make his decision.

Woodruff, who helped draft a study on the county completed by a Georgia Tech's Economic Development Institute last fall, said impact fees would just be another way for Barrow to manage its growth.

"It's a way for them to be in control of their future," she said.