

Beach buys into county impact fee plan

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ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH -- St. Johns County impact fees collected inside the limits of St. Augustine Beach will now be partially shared with the city.

On a 4-1 vote at Monday night's special meeting, the City Commission passed an agreement with the county that will allow the city to get 75 percent of the law enforcement impact fees, 50 percent of the public building and road fees, and 25 percent of the park fees.

That means a total of about \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually will be added to the Beach's \$7.7 million budget.

The city is not pinched at the moment. The commission on Monday approved a 2.0 mill assessment that will bring in \$1.85 million, up from \$1.44 million in 2005. In its tentative budget, also passed Monday night, the city's 46 employees got a 2.9 percent pay raise, with up to 4 percent more for merit. Also authorized were pay increases for starting police officers -- from \$28,769 to \$32,000 -- as well as the hiring of two new maintenance workers. The new fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

Mayor Frank Charles made a motion to accept the proposed impact fee agreement.

"We would have collected about \$500,000 over the past six years," Charles said. "This will bring more money into the city. I see no reason why we can't adopt it tonight."

Commissioner Don Terrill moved to delay acceptance because, as Terrill said, high county commercial impact fees will discourage businesses from moving to the Beach.

"I think this may be a bit preliminary. (The figures) we got from the county are tentative," he said.

He wants the city to opt out of the impact fee schedule and not collect them.

His motion was defeated.

Vice Mayor Ed George said impact fees were a "crucial item that should have been dealt with years ago" but weren't. He said that if the city delayed the agreement, it might

miss collecting the fees for projects just starting.

"There are (new projects) right around the corner. The county has incentives for commercial development in place," George said.

Commissioner Barbara Ellis echoed support. "We're losing money not doing it," she said.

Assistant county administrators Scott Clem and Ted Zebrowsky were there in case the commission had any questions about the agreement.

Clem said after the vote that sharing the fees is good for both the city and county.

Later this year, he is going to make the same pitch to Hastings and St. Augustine.

"This allows St. Augustine Beach to directly control the (impact fee) money and make the decisions on how to spend it," Clem said. "We hope to make this a model for the other municipalities."

A public hearing on the budget is set for Sept. 12, at 7 p.m. at City Hall.

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