

Beach wants county to raise percentage of impact fees

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ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH -- The City Commission voted 3-1 Monday night to ask the St. Johns County Commission to raise the percentage of impact fees for roads and public buildings the city would receive under a proposed revenue sharing agreement.

County Commission Chairman Bruce Maguire told the commission at its monthly meeting that the beach city has an opportunity to receive more than \$200,000 from new construction impact fees collected within the city under the county's impact fee ordinance.

"How you spend it (relative to growth) is totally up to you," he said.

Maguire told the commission the money that could be returned under an agreement between the county and the city to help it meet additional growth needs without having to levy additional taxes.

The proposal from the County Commission is for the beach city to receive a percentage of impact fees for specific categories of infrastructure including police, public parks, sidewalks, roads, bike paths, and public buildings, including rest rooms, as long as their needs are related to growth within the city.

At the present time, the beach only receives a 3-percent administrative fee for collecting the fees and forwarding them to the county.

As commissioners were reviewing the maximum proportionate share of impact fees, Commissioner Barbara Ellis asked if the share for public buildings, which is listed at 75 percent, and for roads, listed at 25 percent, could be switched. Ellis believes growth will require more road-related construction than public building construction. Instead of a switch, Maguire suggested, "Why not 50-50?"

The commission then voted on the 50-50 proposal with Ellis, Mayor Frank Charles and Vice Mayor Ed George voting yes and Commissioner Don Terrill, no. Commissioner Michael Longstreet was absent.

Maguire said he intends to ask the County Commission today to change the proposed proportionate impacts for roads and public buildings as the beach commission has requested.

If Maguire is successful in his quest, a revised agreement will be brought to the beach commission at a special meeting in two weeks for further consideration.

Maguire said the impact fees collected for fire/rescue service would stay with the county totally because the county provides those services within the beach city. Also, impact fees collected for schools would go to the School Board, he said.

During the discussion, Terrill objected because he said impact fees can limit commercial development, which he said the city needs. He said residential growth does not pay for itself in terms of impacts.

Terrill said after the vote that he objects to impact fees entirely and would like to see them removed.

He said his particular concern is the residential units are not measured by square footage while commercial buildings are. He said residential growth outweighs commercial at the beach but pays the lower rate for impact.

"I want to get us out of the impact fee agreement totally," he said of the beach's involvement. "But, don't worry, that's not about to happen."

The county recently adopted new impact fees for new residential construction but has held off on changing the commercial fees pending further study. The commission had received a revised proposal from its impact fee consultant, James Nicholas, of Gainesville, Maguire said. He said the St. Augustine & St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce has told him that it would like to have an additional study done by another consultant at the chamber's expense. He said if that is done, then the commission would look at both studies in determining what the county's new commercial fees would be.

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