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Bonita impact fees to swell 132 percent

Builder road costs to be highest in Lee

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Road impact fees charged to single-family home builders in Bonita Springs will surge nearly 132 percent during the next nine months, making the city's road fees the highest in Lee County.

The city council voted unanimously Wednesday to raise the fees about 66 percent, from \$2,436 per single-family home to \$4,041.50, effective Oct. 1.

The other 66 percent kicks in on April 1, 2006, to push road fees to \$5,647.

That's a \$3,211 increase in road fees, the one-time charge new home builders pay to cover the cost of road construction.

"What got me immediately was, if I go a half-mile south of here, they're 2 1/2 times higher" in Collier County, Councilman John Joyce said.

In Collier, road fees for single-family homes vary, but a 2,000-square-foot home, for example, would cost \$5,985 in road fees.

Come April, Bonita's fees will lag Collier by just \$338.

All impact fees in Bonita — including parks, schools, fire rescue, emergency management and utilities — could exceed \$15,000.

Lee commissioners are considering raising their road fees by 22 percent, from \$2,436 to \$2,971, which would be the second highest in the county.

Bonita and Lee got their recommendations from Duncan/Associates, a consulting firm in Austin, Texas.

Jim Duncan, president of Duncan/Associates, said at last month's council meeting that \$5,647 may draw a lawsuit but is legally defensible.

Michael Reitmann, president of the Lee Building Industry Association, said the higher road fees are horrible.

"The misconception is the building industry pays impact fees," he said. "That's wrong. It's passed on to the consumer."

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For example, when The Lakes at Bonita Grande is completed during the next decade, residents in the 450-home community in east Bonita will pay the difference in impact fees when they buy their houses.

But, Reitmann said, people who buy homes in upscale communities don't suffer — it's those who need affordable housing.

"The nurses, the firefighters can't pay for these homes," he said. "Our concern is the people who work in the community."

It's Mayor Jay Arend's concern, too.

He asked about exemptions in road fees for affordable housing.

City Attorney Audrey Vance advised against it, calling an affordable housing exemption a deficiency.

"It opens you up to a legal challenge."

Then taxpayers pay the difference, City Manager Gary Price said.

"You just pay your impact fee out of another fund," he said. "You don't waive it, you absorb it."

Ron Pure complained that county commissioners have not increased their fees for several years.

"We've lost out by not increasing to Collier County's level," he said. "By not having collected that amount, that means higher taxes for the people in Lee County."

<< [Back](#)