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Back to Home > News > Wednesday, Aug 17, 2005

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## Impact fees could hit max

NICK MASON  
Herald Staff Writer

**MANATEE** - Impact fees imposed on developers and builders soon may be the maximum amounts that Manatee County commissioners believe they can justify and defend in court.

Some impact fees levied on new construction in unincorporated Manatee County would rise more than 35 percent if commissioners proceed with plans unveiled Tuesday to boost impact fees to 100 percent levels in each fee category.

Commissioners surprised their staff and the construction industry by spelling out their plans to raise impact fees effective Oct. 1 to the maximum levels that a consultant two years ago said could be supported against any legal challenge. Before Tuesday, the largest increase suggested was to hit 90 percent of the maximum in most categories.

Final action could come Tuesday.

"I would like us to go to 100 percent," Commissioner Donna Hayes said, starting the conversation about increases higher than planned earlier.

Commissioner Amy Stein said she had previously suggested the 90 percent levels because that "gives you a little bit of a hedge," if the county is sued and impact fee amounts and the method of calculating them are challenged in court.

But other commissioners quickly sided with Hayes and said the need for more capital projects, particularly road-construction work, justifies collecting the maximum across-the-board.

"Our residents don't care where the money comes from when they are stuck in a half-mile of traffic on State Road 70. They just want it fixed," Chairman Ron Getman said.

The review of county impact fees began two months ago with commissioners looking at advancing fee increases

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scheduled for June 2006 by more than eight months to a new effective date of Oct. 1. But the focus expanded to raising the fees while also advancing the effective date, leaving the construction industry stunned by the change.

"It's just hard to see there is any need for you to take this action today," Jay Brady, executive director of Gulf Coast Builders Exchange, told commissioners Tuesday in a public hearing. "You don't need to do this."

Impact fees are a one-time charge on construction that Manatee County government collects to help pay capital costs for roads, parks, law enforcement, ambulance and emergency communication services. County officials expect to collect \$10.65 million per year under the current fee schedule.

All county impact fees are imposed on residential construction, but non-residential construction is exempt from parks fees because businesses do not create demand for parks facilities.

Current county fees are \$3,028 for a single-family home with two or fewer bedrooms, \$3,743 for a three-bedroom home and \$5,117 for a home with four or more bedrooms.

Impact fees levied on businesses vary based on the type of business. For shopping centers and offices, fees also vary based on their size.

Clarke said Tuesday that she did not have the 100 percent fee amounts calculated to give to commissioners and the public. The highest ones available were for 90 percent levels in some categories. That proposal would raise county impact fees to \$4,025 for a single-family home with two or fewer bedrooms, \$4,976 for a three-bedroom home and \$6,802 for a home with four or more bedrooms.

Commissioners also are scheduled to consider advancing and raising school impact fees Tuesday. If those go to the 100 percent mark, the school impact fee for single-family home would be \$5,886, Clarke said.

3

Nick Mason, *county government reporter*, can be reached at 745-7081 or at [nmason@HeraldToday.com](mailto:nmason@HeraldToday.com).

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