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School overcrowding concerns businesses

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LAKWOOD RANCH - Business owners are concerned that school overcrowding in East Manatee might dissuade top job candidates from relocating to the area.

"We business people are just as much at risk if we don't have schools," said Bob DeCecco, president of the Lakewood Ranch Business Alliance. "If word gets out that we don't have schools here people will not move into this area."

DeCecco's remarks were directed to Donna Hayes, Manatee County commissioner and guest speaker. Thursday's Alliance meeting was held at Manatee Community College's Lakewood Ranch center.

The Alliance represents more than 300 businesses.

Hayes said she agreed that lack of schools could be a threat to business owners, but that solving the problem will require putting together pieces of a complex financial puzzle.

"We are growing fast, one child for every three homes," Hayes said. "Developments are popping up all over and we must revisit the transfer tax and impact fees. School impact fees are set at 55 percent of the allowable amount. We will have to make an adjustment."

Buyers of new homes currently pay a \$3,200 school impact fee. That is proposed to rise to \$4,200 in two years, Hayes said.

Hayes proposes raising school impact fees another 45 percent, up to the allowable limit of roughly \$7,650.

She also supports a transfer tax of \$250 paid by buyers of pre-owned homes.

"But even those remedies won't be enough," Hayes said.

Alliance Chairman Dave Minton asked Hayes to investigate if school impact fees are only used in the areas where they are collected.

"There are a lot of us who wonder if impact fees collected here stay here," Minton said. "Or are they held and used wherever they are needed?"

"We just feel that we have huge needs out east and we are not on the radar," Minton added.

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