

Posted on Wed, Jul. 27, 2005

Builders could see earlier, costlier fees in Manatee

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MANATEE - Impact fees levied on developers and builders in Manatee County may be raised more and faster than scheduled.

County Commissioner Amy Stein suggested Tuesday that commissioners look at higher fees than amounts now scheduled to take effect in June 2006, and which may be advanced to Oct. 1.

"Maybe this is not enough of an increase and maybe it should go higher," Stein said during a commission public hearing about accelerating the timing of the next increases.

County impact fees are one-time charges on new construction to help county government pay capital costs for roads, parks, law enforcement and ambulance services.

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

Those fees are scheduled to increase June 19, 2006, to \$3,542 for a home with two or fewer bedrooms, \$4,378 for a three-bedroom home and \$5,985 for a home with four or more bedrooms. But commissioners last month informally agreed to move up those increases to Oct. 1.

Nonresidential impact fees vary based on the type of business. Those fees also would accelerate to Oct. 1 under the proposal.

But Stein and other commissioners raised the possibility Tuesday of increasing the fees by larger amounts because the county faces rising costs to buy land, construct roads and buildings and buy equipment, which are partly paid with impact fees.

Stein asked Planning Director Carol Clarke to determine how much impact fees would be if commissioners set them at 85 percent to 90 percent of their legal limit that could be justified in court.

Clarke did some quick math during a meeting recess and concluded the \$4,378 proposed charge for a three-bedroom home would be about 80 percent of the maximum level that could be defended in a court challenge, based a consultant's study done before impact fees were raised in 2004. She plans to bring commissioners all of the 85 percent and 90 percent figures when commissioners host a second public hearing Aug. 16.

"I think we should look at the higher numbers," Stein said, noting that fee increases since 2004 failed to keep pace with rising construction costs that "just peeled off like a race car."

Commissioners received conflicting advice Tuesday from county residents and the construction industry about raising impact fees Oct. 1.

"I'm for increasing them and not waiting to 2006," Sally Hughes of west Bradenton said during the public

hearing. "I'm not really criticizing you. I'm saying, 'Get going.' "

Bambi Spahr of the Home Builders Association of Manatee County told commissioners that association members want information about past and future spending of the county's income from impact fees before action is taken to advance the next round of increases.

"We believe it's premature to move forward with this proposal," Spahr said.

Spahr signed up to speak against the acceleration of fees, but she told commissioners that the association does not oppose impact fees but believes they "alone are not the answer."

Commissioners are scheduled to consider advancing county and school impact fees Aug. 16. They may vote after hosting a public hearing that day.

The current school impact fee of \$4,088.25 for a single-family home is scheduled to increase to \$4,761 in June 2006, but the Manatee County School Board wants school impact fee increases advanced to Oct. 1 to match the county's proposed schedule. Similar increases of school impact fees are proposed for other types of residences.

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