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Sen. Mike Bennett, left, and Rep. Donna Clarke, right, file the bill to reduce impact fees.

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## Builders take on fees

*A push against impact fees alarms local leaders*

By TOM ARTHUR  
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Florida homebuilders are pushing legislation that would reduce the impact fees they pay when they build new homes.

But county governments that rely on those fees to pay for new schools, roads and other infrastructure created by growth are worried it could cost them millions.

And they want state lawmakers to stop meddling in their finances.

"It's none of the state's business," said Sarasota County Commissioner Jon Thaxton. "This is county government's business. We are the ones responsible for assessing and spending the fees."

Impact fees have been a fact of life for developers and homebuyers in Florida for three decades, helping fund the growth boom.

Counties across the state decide how much to collect and how to spend the money.

But that might change under a bill filed this week by state Sen. Mike Bennett, R-Bradenton, and state Rep. Donna Clarke, R-Sarasota.

Just last week, Bennett created a stir by proposing to give counties more power to raise taxes on their own. Some county commissioners thought he was just trying to shift the burden of raising taxes away from the state and onto the counties.

As written, the impact fee bill would limit the administrative costs local governments can attach to impact fees and require that impact fee discounts be granted to developers. It would also lengthen the time an increase in fees can be enacted, and require local governments to report impact fee information to a state auditor.

The net effect, local government officials said Friday, would be to lower the amount developers pay.

William Clague, an assistant county attorney in Manatee County, recommended in a memo this week that county commissioners pass a resolution opposing the bill.

The result of the bill, he wrote, "will be to obliterate the county's impact fee program."

Bennett said Friday the bill is more about standardizing impact fee collection than it is about money.

"There's no definition of impact fees, or how they should be calculated," he said. "So, in the county of Manatee you have it one way, in Sarasota another and in Collier another. This clarifies how they should be calculated."

He said he did not think the bill, if passed, would drastically reduce the amount of money counties collect.

But Assistant County Administrator Dave Bullock said the bill would significantly reduce the fees collected for transportation.

"What they are really doing

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