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Builders to challenge Palm Beach County on growth fees

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By [Hector Florin](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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Anti-tax sentiment is expected to simmer again in Palm Beach County today as the local builders association plans to oppose a proposed impact fee increase.

Owners of new homes would pay up to \$1,800 more in impact fees, used to pay the cost of growth.

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The Gold Coast Builders Association said the added fees create more obstacles for prospective owners of new homes.

The association said in a letter sent Monday to county commissioners, "Another significant increase in the cost of housing, which is already skyrocketing, will make developing affordable and workforce housing just that much more difficult."

All new homeowners would pay, at minimum, almost \$1,000 more than now after January, if the new rates are approved. Total combined fees would surpass \$10,000 for all new homes larger than 1,400 square feet.

The Gold Coast Builders Association is taking aim at the school impact fee, the largest proposed increase, which could go up by as much as \$1,000 for the largest homes.

Gold Coast members also question the timing of the increase, a year after county voters approved a half-cent sales tax that could produce an estimated \$560 million in school construction projects through the end of the decade.

"This isn't the time to ask for all this money," said Brenda Talbert, Gold Coast's executive vice president. "These fees are passed on directly to the consumer."

The association also disputes how the county's consultant calculated school impact fees.

"We have been conservative in the school impact fee methodology," Deputy County Administrator Verdenia Baker said.

The fees have prompted concern among business organizations and those interested in affordable housing. Housing prices and building materials continue to soar, thus reducing housing options for many.






"I don't know how you don't do impact fees," Commissioner Jeff Koons said. Perhaps, he said, the money could come from other sources, or a special program could be created for those who qualify for attainable housing.

Road impact fees are the largest revenue source for road construction, providing for almost 40 percent of the \$549 million in projects planned for the next five years, according to the county engineer's office.

Yet the added fees and property tax increases have sparked emotions among local builders and business leaders.

The Palm Beach County Economic Council spoke this month against the county's property tax rate, which eventually was lowered, but still results in residents paying more in taxes because of rising property values.

County commissioners will discuss the impact fees at their meeting at 9:30 a.m. today on the sixth floor of the government center, 301 N. Olive Ave. in West Palm Beach.

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