



Changing Impact Fee Payment Rule Is A Great Idea Nation's Economic Situation Obvious All Around Us

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The Highlands County Commission will hear on Tuesday a proposal to change when contractors have to pay impact fees. This makes perfect sense and we hope the commission approves the change.

The 11 member Citizens Advisory Committee on Impact Fees is suggesting that the county not require payment of the impact fees until after a home or building is completed, and a certificate of occupancy is issued. As it stands, contractors must pay the impact fee up front, before construction begins.

Jack Richie, chairman of the advisory committee, said it's a fairness issue and will help contractors attain financing for projects. That makes sense, and as the committee says, there are no impacts until a building or home has occupants.

On a typical new home, that means the \$7,000 impact fee would not be charged until someone was ready to move in. If you are building your own home, however, the fee would be charged as the rule currently states.

Ritchie said a lot of counties are making this change in the rules for impact fees. It makes sense, and certainly it's fairer. We believe the fee should not be charged for any construction until someone is ready to move in, regardless of whether it's a licensed contractor or a private individual building a home. But this is a good first step, and if more changes can make the process better, let's do it.

A person driving around Highlands County can see the signs of the tough economy we're living in these days. Closed businesses sit idle. Sometimes it takes weeks to notice the latest business that couldn't hang on. It's truly sad to see these places close their doors.

Knowing that a hard-working entrepreneur put everything on the line to start a business, and then have it fail through no fault of their own, leaves most of us feeling depressed that what should be the American dream became nothing more than a nightmare.

The same signs can be seen driving through neighborhoods. It's not difficult to spot the homes that have been abandoned. Many nice homes in good neighborhoods have lawns that are overgrown, and look out of place next to well-manicured landscapes. It's obvious no one is living there, and the homes are empty. It's heartbreaking for the homeowners and the neighbors who must deal with the blight.

Signs of our nation's souring economy are all around us. Some day it will turn around, but for now, all we can do is keep moving forward, doing the best we can, and hope we all can outlast this terrible situation.

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