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## Charlotte fee changes designed to foster growth

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Changes made this week to Charlotte County's impact fee ordinance are designed to make the county more affordable for new businesses and spur completion of unfinished homes.

Some single-family residential building permits obtained in 2006 expired because of the construction downturn, and incomplete houses dot the landscape.

The 2006 impact fees were as high as \$12,000 to \$14,000. In 2009, the county adopted a tiered system that lowered impact fees. The ordinance, however, required that anyone wanting to renew 2006 permits had to pay the higher fees, which discouraged buyers from scooping up incomplete homes and finishing them, said building and growth management director Jeff Ruggieri. He said there are 23 housing permits that fit that mold.

Under the changes, people holding expired permits can now renew them and pay the 2009 rates of about \$4,000, he said, or seek reimbursement of the difference in rates if they already have renewed.

The revisions approved Tuesday by commissioners also include: installment payments for nonresidential impact fees; up to a 10-year deferral on impact fees for nonresidential projects that meet certain economic development criteria; and no additional impact fees for commercial expansions that do not significantly increase traffic.

Impact fees are assessed on new construction to help pay for roads and other infrastructure.

Ruggieri said nearby counties may offer either an installment plan or a deferral program, but perhaps not both. He said the revised ordinance will give Charlotte a competitive advantage, or at least level the playing field, in attracting commercial development.

Suzanne Graham, governmental affairs chairwoman for the Charlotte DeSoto Building Industry Association, said that while the industry is opposed to impact fees in general, the county's action is a positive step to get expired permits moving again.

"Now, more than ever, we want to work together to foster growth and bring other types of industry to Charlotte County, as well as helping our industry get back to work," Graham said.

Commissioner Robert Skidmore suggested that an ad hoc committee of business owners and residents be formed to look at eliminating or reducing nonessential impact fees, but his motion gained no support.

In June, Skidmore unsuccessfully sought to suspend residential and commercial impact fees, saying Manatee, Sarasota and DeSoto counties had done so to spur



building. Skidmore says developers' top complaint is high upfront costs, but other commissioners say there is no correlation between reduced impact fees and construction.

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