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STAFF PHOTO / NINA GREIPEL

James Nicholas, University of Florida professor of urban and regional planning and an impact fee expert, discusses the report on impact fees he prepared for Charlotte County on Tuesday at a County Commission workshop.

## **Impact fee tier is considered Charlotte commissioners say they are contemplating charging impact fees based on the size of a house.**

By PATRICK WHITTLE

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CHARLOTTE COUNTY -- Charlotte County's impact fees are almost certain to increase dramatically, but the county could create a fee structure that places most of the burden on those who build or buy larger homes.

That was the sentiment from the County Commission on Tuesday when the county publicly aired its proposed impact fee hike for the first time.

Impact fees are one-time taxes charged on new homes and businesses to help pay for the impact of growth on services and infrastructure. Recommendations based on a study from a University of Florida professor, released Jan. 3, would bump Charlotte's impact fees from \$2,510 to \$9,263 for a single-family home.

Charlotte adopted its impact fees in the mid-1980s and last updated them 12 years ago.

The commissioners took no formal action Tuesday, but instructed county staff to gather information for a public hearing in February. The new fee structure must undergo public hearings and be approved by the County Commission before it becomes law.

County Commissioner Adam Cummings said the county will likely have to raise the fees, but could also adopt a "tiered" fee system in the future. Such a system would base impact fees on the square footage of a home.

The tiered system could make the fee hike less painful for low- and moderate-income families, Commissioner Tom D'Aprile said.

"Should impact fees be based on the size of a home? Yes, maybe that's where we are going," he said.

The commissioners' comments came during a workshop with James Nicholas, the UF professor who prepared the study.

Nicholas said the commissioners have several options to help prevent the impact fees from hurting affordable housing. They include:

The tiered system;

An exception to the fee for low-income homebuilders;

An "affordable housing impact fee," which would charge homebuilders a fee that could be used to help create affordable housing.

However, more research is needed before any of these ideas can be written into law, Nicholas said. He added that if the county had updated its impact fees more frequently -- perhaps every two or five years -- the increase wouldn't be so dramatic.

"You are leaving the impact fees alone for so long. Don't do that," Nicholas said. "You are bringing sticker shock to the industry."

A small crowd of builders and affordable housing advocates

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