



## City Hopes Fees Have An Impact

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**NEW TAMPA - NEW TAMPA** - The city has collected \$17.3 million in transportation impact fees in New Tampa during the past decade but managed to complete only one road project.

Since 1998, Tampa has spent \$10.4 million of impact fee money in the University North district. More than \$4 million went to the widening of Cross Creek Boulevard. And the city pays 3 percent of the impact fees every year to the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority.

But several million dollars also went to pay for studies and land for two projects that likely will never get built: the East-West Road and New Tampa Boulevard Bridge.

"I know the money has to be spent," City Councilman Joseph Caetano said, "but it doesn't sound like it's being spent effectively."

The city has poured at least \$4 million into the toll road and adjoining bridge over Interstate 75. That included a deal in 2005 to pay developer Lennar \$1.6 million for several undeveloped lots in two of New Tampa's priciest subdivisions: Whitehall and Ashington Estates.

Caetano said the city paid the homeowners association in Whitehall \$80,000 to maintain nonexistent drainage ponds. "That's a lot of money for mowing the grass," he said. "That's money we can never get back."

Developers pay impact fees ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,000 on each new home they build. Those costs get passed along to the home buyers. The city is required to spend the impact fee money within six years or it has to return the money to the developer.

Tampa Transportation Director Jean Dorzback said the city has never had to return impact fee money. "Usually, it's not a problem, having aging monies," Dorzback said.

That's because if any of the funds are close to expiring, the department must find another project to spend it on, she said.

The New Tampa Boulevard Bridge over I-75 has been designed and ready to build since 2005. When the city shifted money to pay for Cross Creek in 2005, the bridge project

suddenly had a \$4 million shortfall.

So the following the year, the administration decided to link the project with the proposed East-West Road. The city council shifted the project to the Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority, which was seeking a private investor to build the toll road.

Frank Margarella, president of the New Tampa Community Council, said Mayor Pam Iorio's decision to link the projects may be what kills both.

"It was her edict," he said. "Those were always supposed to be separate projects."

The Federal Highway Administration, which had to approve the toll road and interchange with I-275, demanded additional studies extending to West Meadows Boulevard.

"That was the real turning point," said Mike Urette, developer of the Tampa Palms Professional Center. "That was when the talk started getting more negative."

Still, the city could have proceeded with the New Tampa Boulevard Bridge because Hillsborough County commissioners agreed to contribute \$4 million to make up the shortfall.

But Tampa Palms residents, such as Warren Dixon, said that without the toll road, the bridge would only serve to dump traffic into his neighborhood.

"I think it would only serve to invite people to use Tampa Palms Boulevard as a Bruce B. Downs alternate," he said.

Iorio agreed. She has told groups in New Tampa that she would not build the bridge without the toll road.

In addition, the city had accepted nearly a \$1 million from Tampa Palms developer Lennar Land Partners for the bridge over I-75, which would connect New Tampa Boulevard to Commerce Park Boulevard. The payment was part of a development order extending the final build-out date for the community.

"I do think that \$1 million is an interesting issue," Urette said. "I'm sure Lennar would like to get that money back."

Local officials with Lennar said they have no comment on the status of the transaction.

City planner Susan Johnson said the payment could go to widening Commerce Park Boulevard to four lanes. "We have to live by the agreement," she said. "That road was always anticipated to be a collector road."

But Tampa Palms residents say it makes no sense to widen the dead-end road. Even Urette, who was counting on the bridge to bring traffic to his office park, said the city shouldn't widen Commerce Park.

"I think we don't need to spend money unwisely," Urette said. "It doesn't make sense to widen a dead-end road."

Margarella said he hopes Iorio will rethink her position on the bridge. "I understand there was political baggage, but I hope they revisit that decision," he said.

Dorzback said the impact fee money would likely be spent on widening Cross Creek Boulevard's final segment. But Caetano said he isn't thrilled with that plan because it dumps traffic onto Morris Bridge Road, which can never be widened.

#### WHERE THE MONEY WENT

Here's how the city spent some of its impact fee money in New Tampa:

FY2001: Loan to the Florida Department of Transportation for Bruce B. Downs Boulevard widening, \$1.2 million (FDOT paid the money back in 2005).

FY2002: Cross Creek Boulevard extension right of way, \$461,000.

FY2004: Access road for St. James United Methodist Church, \$400,000.

FY2005: Right of way for East-West Road, \$1.6 million.

FY2006: Cross Creek Boulevard widening, \$2.25 million.

FY2007: Cross Creek Boulevard widening, \$1.8 million.

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