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City board does turnabout, backs school impact fee

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Once-skeptical Macclenny officials expressed support Tuesday night for collecting an impact fee on behalf of the school district, then chided the county for its role in setting the amount of the fee. The city commission took no official action but indicated it would likely enter an agreement with the county to collect the fee with each building permit it issues. Neither the city nor the school board can enact an educational impact fee. And the school board cannot collect it because it does not issue building permits, so the county must pass the fee ordinance.

County commissioners have scheduled a public hearing November 21 on a \$1000 school impact fee, which automatically doubles after one year. Ms. Barton said commissioners "encouraged" the school board to structure it that way.

Macclenny officials were puzzled.

"If it's going to be \$2000, why not do it now?" asked Macclenny Commissioner Vernon Bennett. "They need to stand up and be men." He presumably wasn't referring to county commission Chairwoman Julie Combs.

"I don't mean to throw rocks at them, but they need to step up," echoed Commissioner Phil Rhoden. "The need is now."

Ironically, just two weeks ago, the commission directed its attorney to determine whether the city could legally refuse to become involved with school impact fees.

"We have never been involved in their funding process and I don't want to be involved now unless it's mandated," said Mayor Gary Dopson then. Commissioner Bennett said at the same meeting he would vote against implementing a fee for the school board "unless someone can show me different."

He also railed against the district for not sending someone to the city meeting.

On Tuesday night, however, School Superintendent Paula Barton showed up, as did school board member Dean Griffis, along with the board's impact fee consultant and attorney.

After Ms. Barton spoke to the commission, consultant Ken Creveling repeated the presentation he'd given school officials earlier this year about the district's financial needs to meet projected growth.

He told the city commission that the schools could justify an impact fee of

up to \$5068.

Impact fees, levied on new construction, are intended to help pay for the additional roads, schools, police and fire services needed to accommodate growth.

There are rules governing when, where and how much can be spent, and the fees must be justifiable.

The fees will be paid when a building permit is pulled.

The county has already passed an impact fee of \$1500. Glen St. Mary is covered under the county's ordinance.

Macclenny has tentatively settled on a fee of \$3000. The commission re-scheduled a first reading of the ordinance for November 14.

While the city's impact fee will be apportioned among transportation, law enforcement, emergency services, fire services and recreation, the county's is exclusively for transportation.

According to the county's proposed ordinance for the school impact fee, the money will be spent on land acquisition, construction of facilities and buses, among other things.

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