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- Admin Access
News / CMS

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[Home /](#)

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City fees poised at \$2777 for growth expense

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Macclenny officials are poised to enact an impact fee of \$2777, which would exceed the combined fees contemplated by the county and the school district. City commissioners at their meeting Tuesday accepted recommendations contained in a study by consultant Frank Darabi of Gainesville.

They did not formally approve the fees because the ordinance must be advertised for public hearing and final vote.

Commissioners asked city attorney Frank Maloney to consult with Mr. Darabi and write a draft ordinance as soon as possible.

They scheduled a special meeting for October 25.

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

There are rules governing when, where and how much can be spent, and the fees must be justifiable, which is the intent of Mr. Darabi's study.

He said he conducted the impact fee study for the city, county and Glen St. Mary, and recommended identical amounts for each. The school board hired its own consultant.

The county, however, decided to forego his suggestion, and has tentatively approved a fee of \$1500.

The school board's consultant, Urbanomics Inc., said the district could justify a fee of up to \$5068. While the board has yet to formally announce the amount, it's likely to propose a \$1000 fee. The county must enact the school portion of the ordinance because the board is not empowered to pass laws.

Mr. Darabi's recommendation of \$2777 was broken down into five different categories – \$880 for transportation, \$704 for law enforcement, \$300 for emergency management, \$678 for fire service and \$215 for recreation.

He arrived at each amount by:

- determining what would be needed in each category – for instance, fire services would require a new vehicle and station;
- figuring the cost (in this example, about \$4 million);
- dividing the cost by the projected number of building permits through 2014.

By contrast, the county's \$1500 fee is all for transportation; the school

board's is obviously for education needs, such as new schools and buses. City officials generally agreed with the recommended amount for each category except for transportation.

Mr. Darabi assumed improvements – curbs and turning lanes – to three stretches of road, all involving CR 23A or CR 23B.

Commissioner Vernon Bennett questioned whether the city should be spending money on county roads.

"We're going to pay to fix their roads... they're not going to put anything in?"

"That's not right, it's not fair to the people here."

He said there has been a gentlemen's agreement for the city to help the county with the roads.

Mayor Gary Dopson said, "They should equal what we put into it. It should be 50-50."

Commissioner Bennett agreed, saying, "I want to see the county take \$880 and put it toward those roads."

Macclenny manager Gerald Dopson and Mr. Darabi will meet with the county to work out details.

After Mr. Darabi's presentation, Commissioner Bennett quickly jumped on board.

"I'm in favor of it. We need it, and the sooner the better.

"On a \$135,000 house, another \$2000 or \$3000 isn't going to make that much of a difference to them," he said.

None of the commissioners expressed opposition to the recommendations when the mayor asked informally, but only Commissioner Bennett stated his support.

Later, the mayor said he would like to prevent a rush of people pulling permits to a beat the deadline for the ordinance to take effect.

Mr. Maloney will look into the legality of doing so.

Engineer Darabi said after Tuesday's meeting he intends to propose a similar fee level be adopted in the Town of Glen St. Mary.

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