

[Back](#)

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City Seeks to Raise Impact Fees

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EAGLE LAKE -- Home buyers and contractors in Eagle Lake will soon likely feel the impact of higher impact fees.

If the new fees are approved, the city will charge total impact fees of between \$3,355 and \$4,600 for a new single-family home, depending on the size of the home. They would be in addition to impact fees charged by Polk County.

More than 1,000 new homes are planned for construction, and if they are all built, the city's population, currently about 2,500, is expected to double within a few years.

City officials know the new homes and the families living in them will have a major impact on the city's services and resources.

The impact fee measure passed 3-1 on first reading after a lengthy discussion at Monday's City Commission meeting. Commissioner John Shamp voted against the ordinance.

"I support impact fees, but they should be fair and equitable," Shamp said. "You can't make new residents pay for years of neglect in old neighborhoods, either. Impact fees are not an endall, fix-all."

Commissioner Randy Billings left the meeting before the vote was taken.

The city's current impact fees for a single-family home total \$2,357 for water and sewer and water and sewer tap fees.

Those fees will continue to be collected.

If the issue is passed next month, revenues from new impact fees will help pay for new public buildings and facilities, public lands and parks and recreation.

Revenues from the impact fees will be set aside in one account for up to 10 years before they must be spent on public facilities, land or parks.

"The fees were put together in the same pot because it gives a small city more discretion on how the money is used," said Gene Boles, the University of Florida consultant who conducted the facilities impact fee study for the city.

For a home 800 square feet or smaller, the additional fees will be \$1,602. Additional fees for a new home 801 square feet to 1,399 square feet will be \$1,885.

New impact fees for a 1,400to 1,999-square-foot home will be \$2,204. Additional impact fees for a home 2,000 square feet to 3,599 square feet will be \$2,566. And impact fees for homes 3,600 square feet and larger will be \$2,847.

New homes are also assessed Polk County impact fees totaling \$14,668 for a single-family home built inside the city limits.

Eagle Lake's fees remain lower than some other Polk cities.

"We're still a lot cheaper than everybody else," said Mayor Suzy Wilson.

Scott Coulombe, executive director of the Polk County Builders Association, monitored the discussion but didn't speak against the fees.

While city officials wanted to begin collecting new impact fees 60 days after adopting the ordinance, Coulombe pointed out that state law prohibits collecting the new fees until 90 days after adoption.

According to the proposed ordinance, the city planned to retain up to 3 percent of impact fee revenue as an administrative fee, but Coulombe pointed out that state law allows the city to retain only enough to cover its administrative costs.

Some commissioners were not familiar with Coulombe's position as a representative of local builders.

"We don't represent you. We represent the people of this town," said Commissioner Melinda Thomas.

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