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## Front Page November 10, 2005

### City, School talk impact fees By Melissa Burnsed

The Macclenny City Council discussed impact fees with representatives from the Baker County School District at their meeting Tuesday night. Superintendent Paula Barton and school board member Dean Griffis came armed with consultants to bolster the school systems need for additional funding through impact fees.

Barton started things off by saying, "Growth is here and it is not a bad thing. We are already up 150 students, right now." Ken Creveling, with Urbanomics Inc. handled the bulk of the presentation. His firm had done the original study for school impact fees and had recommended a maximum potential fee of \$5,068 during the summer.

Creveling gave the councilman a primer in impact fees basics and why the local school system needs them to help pay for expanded capacity.

"According to our projections enrollment in the school system will at least double in the next 25 years...The district will need to build one new school every four or five years in order to accommodate all those new students," he said.

How and on what basis the fees would be applied was discussed, as was where a new school might be located. When pressed Barton told the council that if she had to choose which type of school the district needs to build next, it would be a in the K-8th grade range. She added that the time is fast approaching when the district must decide whether to invest in renovating the older existing schools or to build new facilities.


Macclenny can't legally enact a separate ordinance and must instead endorse the county's legislation through an interlocal agreement and collect the levies when city building permits are pulled. County commissioners were given a copy of the newly revised school proposal at their last meeting and will be discussing it at their meeting, on Monday afternoon.

The school district has considerably lowered its original request and is now seeking an initial fee of \$1,000. However the proposal does call for a \$1,000 increase in the second year. That drew considerable comment from the councilmen.

"I have a question on why only \$1,000 in the first year and then have to escalate it. I believe you should start with what you need. All three boards (referring to the city, school and county) have a responsibility to do what needs to be done," said Mayor Gary Dopson. "I have done some revising on my initial thoughts... regardless of what we and the county do it is not going to be enough. As far as the interlocal agreement is concerned I will be in favor of whatever the county

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decides."

Councilmen Floyd Bennett snapped out, "Well I am not going to go that far, because we don't know what they are going to do. I support the idea of school impact fees but I am not going to say whatever. They are likely to come out with \$5,000 and we would have to go to court and fight it." The Mayor responded, "I don't think based on what they did with their county fees that we have anything to worry about."

"I still don't get the deal with theirs. If we are going to be men then let's stand up and act like it and do the thing right the first time...I should have been there at their meeting and told them what I thought," said Bennett.

Councilman Phil Rhoden concurred, "I don't see a problem with \$2,000 based on what the school's and our consultants have told us. We did the right thing. The need is there now and they (county commissioners) are still debating and not addressing the problem now. They need to step up."

Superintendent Barton was peppered with questions about the county and responded, "I can't answer those. You should ask them."

The council decided to proceed with their impact fee ordinance and add the school component whenever the county enacts their part of it.

A special called meeting was set for Monday at 5pm for the first reading of the new city ordinance, which will allow the city to implement the impact fees at their regular meeting next month.

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