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Clash on St. Lucie impact fees still boiling

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By [Teresa Lane](#)*Palm Beach Post Staff Writer*

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PORT ST. LUCIE — City and county officials made little headway in their dispute over how to divide impact fees for public buildings, roads and parks Thursday, meaning new-home builders south of Midway Road could be socked with paying double fees for those services starting Oct. 1.

Although St. Lucie County Commission Chairwoman Frannie Hutchinson asked Port St. Lucie council members to extend by one or two months the current pact, which expires Sept. 30, council members refused, saying they're uncomfortable with a county study that seeks to justify the county's proposed fee of \$2,852 for a new single-family home.

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Home builders currently pay about \$2,900 for roads, public buildings and parks, and that money is split between the city and county. When the city announced it would no longer collect the joint fee and instead impose its own fee of \$2,712 beginning Oct. 1, county commissioners responded with a county fee of \$2,852, saying they will notify the owners of new homes of the cost and file liens seeking payment if necessary.

City council members continued to argue Thursday that Port St. Lucie residents pay the lion's share of fees for jail cells and the county courthouse despite the fact that most jail inmates live outside Port St. Lucie and most crimes are committed outside the city as well.

As for the county's claim that it needs road impact fees to widen Midway Road from South 25th Street to Florida's Turnpike, Mayor Bob Minsky said those projects could be accomplished with a 10-cent tax rate increase. Instead, the county cut its tax rate by more than that amount.

"The city has just had enough," Minsky said at the end of the contentious two-hour meeting. "We've been begging for consideration and accommodation from the county

(on other matters) for a long time, and the only time we get it is when we stand our ground."

To give the city the \$2,712 it hoped to receive starting Oct. 1, county commissioners proposed that the two agencies raise the overall impact fee for public buildings, roads and parks by \$1,289 in Port St. Lucie. That would allow the county to keep the \$1,252 it currently receives from the formula.







City officials shrugged at that idea, saying city taxpayers already shoulder an unfair burden paying for county roads, parks and buildings.

"Not only are we paying a disproportionate share of public buildings, but we're also paying a disproportionate share of law enforcement impact fees," Councilman Jack Kelly said. "You're taking away the competition of Port St. Lucie builders."

A few dozen of those builders were in the audience Thursday, asking what double fees would do to existing home building contracts and fearing that an additional \$2,800 in impact fees could further narrow the number of families who can afford skyrocketing prices in Port St. Lucie.

"People are going to start wondering, 'Is it really worth leaving Palm Beach County to come up here?' " said Matt Coates of Moore & Coates Construction. "The school impact fees are already going up in December. We're looking at that pyramid of people who can afford houses getting smaller."

Minsky and Hutchinson vowed to talk again next week to try to arrange a follow-up meeting before Sept. 30. Commissioner Doug Coward said he'd agree to give the city more input on how county fees are spent.

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