

Collier commissioners approve report, ask questions later

By I.M. STACKEL

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Every county and city in Florida has to guarantee a measure of service efficiency, known as level of service standards.

That includes roads, schools, cops, jails, libraries, emergency medical response, fire control and parks.

Much of that is paid for with impact fees — sums of money paid by developers to offset the effects of growth.

But with the economy being what it is, no one in Collier County is quite sure whether the level of service required should dictate the impact fee rate, or vice versa.

The issue came up last week when commissioners were reviewing the annual update and inventory report of county jails, libraries, parks and other services.

It was a moot point, since the annual update and inventory report for 2009 was retroactively approved Tuesday — one month and two days after the 2010 fiscal budget kicked in.

Why? No one seems to know why the 2009 inventory isn't approved prior to passage of the 2010 budget, since parks, libraries, jails and roads are the county's big ticket expenses.

Asked Nov. 3 why commissioners approve the growth-related inventory retroactively, Commission Chairwoman Donna Fiala said she didn't know.

Neither did Janet Vasey, chairman of the Productivity Committee's subcommittee on the annual inventory, or Steve Harrison, chairman of the Productivity Committee.

When that question was directed to other commissioners and key county officials, there was no response until county spokesman John Torre issued a Nov. 5 e-mail, stating that the annual update and inventory report is simply a planning document "that is meant to be nothing more than an assessment of whether the county has the necessary infrastructure to continue to support the issuing of permits and local development orders."

While some county officials say the annual update and inventory report is just a planning document, and there aren't any fiscal implications, other county employees say one cannot separate the rate of impact fees and the level of service.

Amy Patterson, the county's impact fee manager, told commissioners that the county cannot reduce a level of service without a cutback in impact fees. That is state law, say county employees.

An example of a level of service standard is, say, 2.77 jail cells for every 1,000 people in county projected population counts.

Population count projections are provided by Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research.

But, if the county has excess parks and jails, for instance, and the county population is not substantially increasing, why are county employees continuing to impose impact fees, asked Commissioner Fred Coyle.

The answer: debt service commissioners committed themselves to when the economy was flush, and state requirements for level of service, say county employees.

Furthermore, while county employees said the annual update and inventory report, itself, is not a state-mandated document, the capital improvement program tied to the county's growth management plan is. The annual update and inventory report reflects those requirements.

For a look at the complete annual inventory and update report go to <http://www.colliergov.net/Index.aspx?page=1581>. If that link doesn't take you to the desired document, go to www.colliergov.net, then to the Community Development and Environment Services page, then, to the Comprehensive Planning page. The report should be the first item available in the menu listed in the column on the left side of the Web page.



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