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Collier approves increase in school impact fee

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Collier County Commissioners voted 4-1 today to approve an increase in school impact fees of more than 200 percent.

Commissioner Tom Henning was the dissenting vote.

The schedule includes a sliding scale of \$8,228 to \$10,017 for single-family homes, \$2,862 for multi-family dwellings and \$5,724 for a mobile home.

The scale would drastically increase the impact fees for the district, which have not been increased since 1992 when the county raised the fees to \$1,778 for new single-family homes, \$827 for multi-family homes and \$1,234 for mobile homes. The increases approved Tuesday are 367 percent each for new single-family and mobile homes and 246 percent for multi-family homes.

The commissioners approved the impact fees over the objections of School Board members and Superintendent Ray Baker, who said they did not have sufficient time to complete an analysis and make a recommendation to the commissioners.

"It was one week ago today that we had our workshop (on impact fees). We saw several proposals up to the last minute. We worked under the assumption we could wait until our May 18 meeting and still have a recommendation to the commissioners by their June 30 deadline," said Board member Linda Abbott.

Under the current policy, commissioners had to have their recommendations to the state by June 30 for implementation July 1.

That is about to change. Legislation both the House and Senate passed last week that would remove the June 30 deadline for impact fees. However, the legislation requires a 90-day wait upon the commissioners' recommendation for an increase in impact fees.

The legislation, which is part of Senate Bill 1194, will now go to Gov. Jeb Bush to sign or veto.

Commissioner Fred Coyle said the commissioners should vote for its consultant's proposal in light of the legislation and the fact that School Board members were planning to bring a recommendation to increase impact fees.

"I know for a fact last year that before and after the governor signed the growth management bill things were assigned to it. We should make a decision on the best information we have," he said.

Henning said the commissioners should extend professional courtesy to the School Board and he would not vote for the implementation of the impact fees.

"The School Board is clearly working to make a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners. I don't see

any reason why this can't wait," he said.

School impact fees are onetime assessments imposed on new residential construction. They raise money to pay a portion of the cost of providing services to new development. Impact fees are assessed for each new home or business built in the county and paid by developers, who typically pass them on to consumers in the form of higher prices.

Collier County has 10 separate impact fees. The fees are also charged for roads, parks, fire departments, jail facilities, emergency medical services, government buildings and law enforcement.

Collier County's current school impact fee of about \$1,800 on a single-family home generates about \$8 million a year, according to Robert Spencer, the district's executive director of financial services. That's a fragment of the cost of keeping up with growth of about 2,000 students per year.

The cost of Elementary School G, which is set to open in 2007, will cost the district \$35.2 million to build, according to the districts capital plan.

The new impact fees will give the district an additional \$23 million for the district.

Find additional coverage in Wednesday's edition of the Daily News.

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