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Commissioners Approve County Admin To Draft Ordinances Extending Impact Fee Reductions

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 by [Doug Miles](#)

MANATEE--After a lengthy discussion and mostly civil debate at Tuesday's regular meeting, [County Commissioners](#) approved a motion (5-2) to have County Administrator Ed Hunzeker draft ordinances to extend the current two year county and education [impact fee reductions](#) for another two years. Mr. Hunzeker will draft the ordinances which are subject to advertised public hearings and another vote for approval before they could be enacted.

In May 2009, the Manatee County Commission voted to suspend impact fees for schools and reduce by fifty percent, road impact fees for a period of two years which expires on July 26, 2011. Impact fees are one-time charges that are collected when new homes or businesses are built, or when existing homes or businesses are expanded, in the unincorporated areas of Manatee County.

This has been a controversial issue in both Manatee and Sarasota counties and among the board of county commissioners. At-Large Commissioner Joe McClash voted against the extensions in 2009 while current Chairwoman Carol Whitmore voted in favor of them. That debate continued today among the board.



County Administrator Ed Hunzeker

In his introductory comments when the agenda item came up, Mr. Hunzeker, who has advocated keeping the impact fees the way they are said, "To maintain impact fee reductions is important in helping recruit businesses to the county. I suggest we keep them in place another two years and evaluate them at that time. Why would you overcharge your customers in today's economy?"

Commissioner Gallen, expressed his concern over the impact fee reductions, "I don't think it helps homeowners", he said. "It shifts the burden to taxpayers and will push some projects aside. I don't think it encourages growth anywhere." The freshman commissioner did add however, that he would support them if there was "a clearer impact fee system."

Commissioner McClash asked the board to defer the item so the board could get more information. "The impact fee needs to be updated before we can make an informed decision", he said. "I'd rather not do it again. How do you develop a vibrant urban core when you subsidize development out east?" Mr. McClash also recommended the board consider a bond issue as an alternative to funding road projects.

Commissioner Donna Hayes urged the board to support the extension saying the lower cost of homes will bring people here. "This is the time to help business", she said.

Commissioner Larry Bustle added, "Timing is everything. 18 months ago we took a leap of faith in reducing transportation impact fees. Impact fee relief will create jobs."

Chairwoman Carol Whitmore said, "We're subsidizing citizens so they can buy a new house, not subsidizing builders. Impact fees are only to pay for new growth."

The board's other freshman commissioner Robin DiSabatino seemed to straddle the issue in her comments saying, "50 percent of something is better than one-hundred-percent of nothing. We're in a different economy now. Extend these cuts and work towards a new code that will encourage new growth in the future."

Jim Kaiser, President of the [Federation of Manatee County Community Associations](#) spoke against the extensions. "We think construction should pay for itself", he said. "Are we giving new construction an advantage? We recommend resetting the impact fees." Mr. Kaiser also expressed some frustration when he came up to speak during the citizen's comments part of the meeting after the commissioners had gone through much of its lengthy debate. "It looks like you already made up your minds", he said. Normally citizen's comments are done before the board discusses an agenda item.

Finally, Commissioner Bustle motioned to approve the agenda item. Commissioner McClash offered a compromise amendment to extend the reductions for one year instead of two until the impact fee study is completed. That motion was voted down 5-2 with Mr. McClash and Mr. Gallen the lone votes in favor of it.

Mr. Bustle's motion was approved 5-2 with Mr. McClash and Mr. Gallen casting the lone nay votes.

Mr. Hunzeker will draft the ordinances to extend the impact fee reductions which will be advertised at a future date for public hearings.

Doug Miles covers Manatee County and Bradenton government and sports for The Bradenton Times. He can be contacted at doug.miles@thebradentontimes.com.

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Comments:

All you tax paying home owners got shafted and will pay for new roads for developers. That was he message five developer elected commissioners sent to the electorate. County Administrator knew the drill, even joined in the debate, and told the ?developer five? what they wanted to hear. They also rejected efforts to have a study competed first and limit the developer tax break to one year to see what the economy does in the next 12 months. Only Commissioners McClash and Gallen, who refuse to accept developer campaign contributions, voted to limit the tax break to one year and have a study done.

One of the ?developer five? said we need new development housing for all the new employees moving in to take the jobs created by the economic development committee.

How about the fifteen thousand foreclosed homes sitting empty and blighting our county neighborhoods. Why not let them buy those houses where the roads already exist.

You need to record the commission meetings and watch them after work to see what is going on in our government as you do not get it from the papers.

Posted by **Richard McNulty** on **January 26, 2011**

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