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FUNDING SCHOOLS

Consultant To Revisit Impact Fee

Advisory panel balks at the suggested \$8,767 charge to new homebuyers.

By [Rebecca Mahoney](#)

The Ledger

BARTOW -- A consultant on Wednesday agreed to revisit a proposed school impact fee after the Polk County School Board said the recommended increase may be too steep.

Consultant Randy Young had suggested increasing the school impact fee on new houses from the current \$1,607 for a singlefamily home to \$8,767 -- a 446 percent leap.

But Bob Williams, the School District's assistant superintendent of facilities and operations, said the dramatic increase wasn't sitting well with several School Board members and asked Young to reconsider his recommendation.

Williams said the board members hadn't voiced their concerns in public and he didn't want to identify them.

"They're not comfortable with what this situation represents," Williams said during Wednesday's meeting of the Impact Advisory Fee Committee.

One of the reasons the increase is so steep is because Young included the costs of meeting the state's class-size reduction amendment, a measure passed by Florida voters 2002. The amendment will require all school districts in the state to build numerous new classrooms to reduce teacher-student ratios.

Williams asked Young to recalculate the proposed fee without considering costs for the classsize amendment. He said state lawmakers should be responsible for paying for the amendment, not homeowners.

"Is it fair, does it make sense, is it defensible, to ask people buying houses in the next five years to step up to the plate and pay up where the Legislature has not?" he said.

Williams estimated that dropping class-size considerations from the calculation would drop the proposed fee from \$8,767 to between \$5,000 and \$6,000.

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The committee unanimously backed Williams' request for a new set of numbers, although several board members expressed concern about paying for the amendment if Polk County doesn't receive help from the Legislature.

"There's no certainty here," said Committee Chairman Robert Dodd. "I'm tired of kids in overcrowded, portable classroom environments. . . . But if we end up going down this road, I want somebody to give me answers about how we're going to pay for new classrooms."

The committee still could endorse the original \$8,767 fee. But the new calculation will give members a different perspective as they work on a recommendation for county commissioners.

Meanwhile, the committee began debating rates for a new impact fee for libraries.

Young suggested that new single-family homes should be assessed \$130 to build and maintain libraries.

Impact fees are charged against new development to defray the cost of providing services to new homes and businesses. The fees cannot be used to make up existing deficits.

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