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In other action

The Manatee County Commission:

Heard that sand destined for Anna Maria beaches could include more rocks and shells than a previous renourishment project. A consultant hired to find the best sand told the commissioners that last year's hurricanes stirred up the ocean bottom where the sand will be dredged, leaving behind sand that is slightly less ideal. Plans for the project, which will begin in May or June, include efforts to limit the amount of rock and shell that reaches the beach.

Formally set aside its push for a growth management charter, opting instead to strengthen a 2002 agreement known as The Accord. The county wants the cities to voluntarily adopt new growth management policies into their own comprehensive plans, which would make the rules legally binding. The county wants to keep away high-rise developments, particularly on the water. But Bradenton, Palmetto and the beach municipalities say those developments provide revenue for sewer lines, roads and other infrastructure projects.

Agreed to set up a seven-person committee to handle the search for a replacement for County Administrator Ernie Padgett. The committee will be made up of the public and county staff. It will post the position for several months and screen candidates. Padgett, the county administrator for 10 years, announced last month that he plans to retire later this year.

Signaled a willingness to help pay to complete restoration of the "Pink House," a two-story Palmetto home built in 1909. The home has been relocated to 5419 U.S. 19 and is being restored by The Historeum, a nonprofit organization that works to save the county's historic buildings. The group has shouldered the entire cost so far but asked the county for \$20,000 to help them overcome hurricane-related complications. The house will become a Manatee County history museum, demonstrating how people lived at the turn of the century.

Counties lambaste impact-fees bill

Officials say the proposal would gut programs.

By CORY SCHOUTEN
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A chorus of local officials expressed anger Tuesday over a bill that would limit their ability to collect impact fees.

"It's the worst bill I've ever seen introduced," said Manatee County Commissioner Joe McClash. "This reflects a person that doesn't understand what's going on in the state of Florida."

Manatee County has borrowed against future impact fees for parks and other expenses. And the school system is considering borrowing against future impact fees to pay for new schools needed now. If that income stream disappears, both could be in even worse shape as they encounter growth, the county commissioners said Tuesday.

Meanwhile, bill sponsor Rep. Donna Clarke, R-Sarasota, told the House Growth Management Committee in Tallahassee that her bill would simply create new "guidelines" for the use of the impact fees. The fees, paid by developers of new homes, generate millions to pay for new schools, roads and utilities needed as a result of growth. Those guidelines would change how impact fees are set and require local governments to provide discounts to builders and home buyers.

The bill, co-sponsored by Sen. Michael Bennett, R-Bradenton, was written at the behest of the Florida Home Builders Association.

Doug Buck, a lobbyist for the home builders, said his association members want to "pay their fair share," but he said there are inequities in the application of the fees across the state. For instance, Buck said some local governments provide tax-based discounts on the fees, while others don't.

Without a discount, home buyers end up having to "pay twice" for the new service in both taxes and impact fees.

The committee ran out of time to act on the bill. Chairman Randy Johnson, R-Celebration, said the committee would take up the bill again at its next meeting.

But county commissioners here said it would gut their impact fee programs and rob them of millions of dollars each year.

McClash suggested asking the Florida Association of Counties to sponsor a constitutional amendment that would preserve the current impact fee system. Other commissioners called the bill "vague" and "misleading." They said it would be impossible to comply with.

The commissioners are concerned the loose language of the bill could require separate impact fees for each property and hurt those who buy affordable housing more than residents of million-dollar mansions.

"If they're going to take away a funding

Continued

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