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County may extend impact-fee freeze

BY RICK NEALE
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Space Coast builders may receive an extra year to secure permits for new construction without shelling out transportation impact fees.

Tuesday morning, the Brevard County Commission unanimously decided to draft an ordinance that would extend its current impact-fee moratorium. A vote is expected Feb. 23.

Why? Economic gloom. Specifically, the ordinance references "the alarming loss of real estate and development-related jobs in the county and the prospect of additional future layoffs at the Kennedy Space Center."

Since the moratorium's inception last March, the county has waived and refunded \$6 million in commercial and residential impact fees.

However, Brevard housing starts still dropped to the lowest level since 1975. And the county has lost more than 9,000 construction jobs.

Commissioner Andy Anderson likened the fee freeze to "a marketing tool" that entices companies to break ground that they otherwise would not.

Example: A West Melbourne day-care center would have been charged \$110,000 in transportation impact fees, county records show. Instead, those fees were refunded in October.

"We need to get businesses up and running that would employ people," Anderson said.

However, Commissioner Chuck Nelson pointed out that the county waived \$782,000 for Sam's Club, which opened in July near Interstate 95 and State Road 520 in west Cocoa.

"They were ready to open -- and we basically gave them back \$800,000," Nelson said. "Here's a national company who certainly could afford to have paid those impact fees."

Nelson asked county administrators to research alternatives to freezing impact fees, such as building-permit waivers.

To pass, the moratorium ordinance requires a supermajority of four out of five "yes" votes.

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Additional Facts

What's next

- The Brevard County Local Planning Agency will consider a revised impact fee moratorium ordinance Feb. 22.
- The following day, the Brevard County Commission will vote on the ordinance.
- The fee freeze affects commercial and residential construction in unincorporated areas, Cape Canaveral, Cocoa, Cocoa Beach, Grant-Valkaria, Indialantic, Indian Harbour Beach, Malabar, Melbourne Beach, Melbourne Village, Palm Shores, Rockledge, Satellite Beach and West Melbourne.