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COUNTY LINES, CITY LIMITS

County may join effort to challenge state on impact fees

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Alachua County may join in a planned legal challenge against a state law that makes it more difficult for local governments to prevail in lawsuits over impact fees.

House Bill 227, which Gov. Charlie Crist signed into law in May, puts the burden of proof on local governments when developers file suit over impact fees. It also requires that judges do not take into account the methodology and studies governments used to arrive at their impact fee amounts when deciding a case.

"That's its purpose: to make it easier for people who do not want to pay their impact fees to challenge them," County Attorney Dave Wagner said.

He said the Florida League of Cities, the Florida Association of Counties, the Florida School Boards Association and eight to 10 individual counties have pledged to be plaintiffs in the suit, which has not yet been filed. Impact fees are one-time charges on development to fund infrastructure needed to accommodate growth, such as roadways and schools.

Transgender rights: The Tampa City Council approved a transgender rights ordinance Thursday in the face of opposition similar to what the Gainesville City Commission faced in early 2008 when it approved a similar anti-discrimination ordinance.

Both cities extended their laws to ensure that a person has equal access to housing, employment, credit and public accommodations regardless of his or her "gender identity."

City Commissioner Craig Lowe said that when the Tampa Council went to approve the ordinance, it changed the definition of "gender identity" to more closely mirror Gainesville's ordinance, which defined the term as an inner sense of being that a person is a different gender than their sex at birth.

Even after two years and a rejected referendum attempting to overthrow the ordinance, Gainesville's ordinance is still the subject of intense scrutiny from some members of the public.

Richard Selwach, who is running for mayor against Lowe, spoke at Thursday's commission meeting recommending an amendment to Gainesville's ordinance that would require people who felt they qualified under the "gender identity" definition to have to register with the city.

Might be Santa: If your phone rings during dinner next week, you may want to pick it up. It just might be Santa.

The city of Gainesville Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Department has made arrangements for Santa Claus and his holiday helpers to call local children ages 8 and younger on the night of Dec. 3 between the hours of 6:30 and 8:30 p.m.

Parents interested in participating should print out a form - on which you can list any special requests or details that you think Santa should know - online at www.cityofgainesville.org and return it to the Administrative Office at 1024 N.E. 14th St., Building A. It can be dropped off, mailed or faxed to 334-3299.

Participation forms are due by 6 p.m. Dec. 1, and Santa can only call people within the 352 area code.

- By Chris Curry and Megan Rolland

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