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County puts brakes on impact fee study

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County commissioners have put a halt to a study examining impact fees until the economy improves.

The last thing the county needs to do right now is even consider raising impact fees, County Commissioner Dave Russell said Friday.

Back in January 2006, county commissioners authorized a study be done that would give the county more precise transportation and trip study data it could use to help better determine impact fee rates in Hernando County.

Commissioners allocated \$184,674 for the "Trip Characteristics Study," to be done by the planning department's consultant, Tindale-Oliver & Associates Inc. of Tampa.

Tindale-Oliver did the first phase of the study and was paid \$140,115.

But county commissioners voted last year to put a stop to the second phase because of the worsening economy.

Russell said commissioners can always revisit the study and have the consultant complete phase two when the economy improves.

County commissioners last November voted unanimously to roll back impact fees for residential and commercial construction to 2001 levels, from the current \$9,200 to \$4,848.

The rollback started Dec. 1, 2009, and lasts one year, after which commissioners will review its effects.

Commissioners hoped the rollback will prompt new home construction and put contractors and trades people back to work.

Already there has been an uptick in the issuance of single-family permits since the rollback started.

The consultant's study determines current travel demand and trip lengths for single-family homes, apartments, fast food restaurants and gas station land uses based on development patterns in the county.

The data collected will be used to help the county calculate its transportation impact fee rates and long-range transportation planning.

It was clear that, because of the worsening economy, there would be no efforts by the county to raise impact fees.

"Why allocate another \$44,000 if you're not going to follow through with the findings of the study?" said Dennis Dix, the county's transportation planning coordinator.

Dix said the county can still use the data collected on development projects submitted to the planning department. Instead of solely using trip generation statistics from developers' consultants, the county now has its own locally-produced data and is more accurate, Dix said.

The second phase of the study would have entailed the consultant gathering more information for public hearings and integrating the data into draft form.