

[Print This Article](#)

By Patrick Donahue  
 pdonahue@effinghamherald.net  
 912-826-5012

## County takes a look at its impact fees

Builders say those fees are having too much impact — on them

Effingham County commissioners are weighing a new slate of impact fees.

In April, commissioners approved a \$60,100 contract with TischlerBise to prepare a capital improvements elements and impact fee analysis.

TischlerBise performed a similar study in 2005, and the county adopted a schedule of impact fees for water, sewer, roads, parks and public safety.

Any changes in the impact fee ordinance would come after a series of public hearings.

"The idea is to get comments from the public as well as the board of commissioners on the analysis," County Administrator David Crawley said.

Without impact fees, said Dr. Dwayne Guthrie of TischlerBise, the county's options include accepting lower levels of service, shift the burden of funding, establish a special district or authority or use broad-based avenues of funding, such as taxes.

"With impact fees, growth pays for itself," he said.

Impact fees are not a revenue raising mechanism, Guthrie said, "but a way to meet growth-related infrastructure needs.

Under the proposal, impact fees for single-family homes will rise from \$7,145 to \$8,012. For multi-family homes, impact fees would rise from \$4,554 to \$6,821. For industrial buildings, the impact fees would be \$1,504 per 1,000 square feet, up from \$984. Impact fees for retail stores and restaurants would go from \$2,014 to \$3,215 per 1,000 square feet.

TischlerBise is recommending a reduction in impact fees for other services buildings, from \$2,714 to \$2,340 per 1,000 square feet.

Builders called upon commissioners to not only not raise the impact fees but to lower the current ones.

"There's very few of us old builders left," Charles Patterson said. "I'm really hurting in this county, and a lot of people are. We need help to get things moving again. The impact fees has cut down on the people who want to build in Effingham County." Patterson said there were five new building permits in the county for July and three of them were for stick-built homes.

"We've killed this county with impact fees," he said. "I really think it's for the decision makers to think about where we're going with this county for the future."

In its study, TischlerBise projects a growth in population from 54,958 to 69,191 in 2020

and 83,577 in 2030. The population in the unincorporated portion of the county will climb from 42,149 in 2010 to 53,064 in 2020 and 64,097 in 2030, according to the analysis.

TischlerBise also is estimating a 2.58 percent growth over the next 20 years in housing units in the county. The study projects an additional 370 single-family homes in the county, taking the total from 14,362 to 18,081.

With its projects, TischlerBise estimates the county will need an additional 3,430 square feet of additional fire station space and will spend \$717,000 on fire stations in growth-related expansion. The apparatus for the new station space is expected to cost \$855,000, and the study calls for the fire impact fee to average \$311,000 a year.

The study also said the county should acquire 31.9 acres of recreational space to add to its current 123 acres. Should the commissioners adopt the recommended impact fees, the recreational charge is expected to generate \$281,000 per year.

Impact fees for roads are projected to raise \$3 million for growth-related system improvements. The impact fees also are expected to provide much of the local funding for a traffic signal at Highway 21 and Old Augusta Road just inside the county line, plus the widening of lanes and the constructing of turn lanes on Blue Jay Road and phase 2 of Old Augusta Road.

Impact fees also will be used to expand the county's water and sewer system. The county has invested \$7.8 million in its 1 million gallons per day wastewater treatment plant, which can be expanded to 2.5 million gallons per day.

The county also has invested nearly \$9 million in a drinking water system. The debt obligations on the system are expected to be paid by 2029, when the daily demand will be 1.03 million gallons per day. That system is expected to be expanded to 2.5 million gallons per day, and over the next five years, the county is planning on installing another 16-inch water main and reimburse developers for water system improvements.

Often the fee is not factored to meet the total amount of improvements and fee payers must receive a benefit, Guthrie said.

The water and sewer impact fees are "pretty much cost recovery for what's in the ground now," Crawley said. The county also spends a "fairly large amount" from the general fund in debt service, he added. The county could look at refinancing its loans for water and sewer work but would need to make a decision on that soon, he said.

Impact fees charged are based on projects in the county's capital improvement element. No analysis of impact fees had been done since TischlerBise's 2005 report.

<http://www.effinghamherald.net/news/article/11457/>