



County to consider \$15 EMS fee for residential property owners

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The Baker County Commission will soon consider establishing a \$15 annual residential property assessment for emergency medical services [EMS] and beginning a one-year hiatus on impact fees. Commissioners authorized the advertisement of public hearings for both measures during a more than four-hour meeting the .afternoon of May 18

The EMS department's roughly \$1.4-million budget is subsidized with each year with revenue from the county's general fund, which .consists largely of property and other tax dollars

.EMS is a drain on the general fund," county manager Joe Cone told the board"

EMS director David Richardson estimated earlier this month the general fund subsidy for EMS is between \$300,000 and \$400,000 a .year. The proposed \$15 assessment on 6889 conventional and mobile homes outside Macclenny would generate about \$103,000

Mr. Cone said the assessment as proposed would only affect residents outside Macclenny, unless the city commissioners chose to .adopt the fee as well

That means county homeowners could potentially end up covering more of the cost for EMS services than those in the city, which .doesn't have its own EMS department

.Macclenny property owners pay both city and county taxes, however

In discussing a temporary moratorium on impact fees, which are paid when new homes and business are built, commissioners were .more divided

Commissioner Gordon Crews reasoned that the drop in revenue for roads and other projects would be worth the potential economic .gains

It's an opportunity for us to help the people of Baker County, whether they're builders or just someone wanting to build a house," he " .said

The county's impact fee for a single family home is \$3750, but \$2250 of that sum goes to the school district. The county's portion, . \$1500, generated about \$13,500 during the first quarter of 2010 and some \$650,000 since impact fees were put in place

Commissioner Mike Griffis also favored the one-year moratorium, saying that combined with the federal government's \$8500 tax .credit, the measure could push some on the fence financially into home ownership

Without forgoing the entire impact fee, commissioners Michael Crews and Alex Robinson didn't believe a moratorium just on the county's portion could boost development. Moratoriums in Bradford and Nassau counties haven't yielded significant growth, they .said

I don't see it working unless we do it with the school," commented Mr. Robinson." .He and Michael Crews eventually acquiesced, agreeing to advertise a public hearing to consider the moratorium

.Both said they hoped to use the hiatus in fees to fix inequities they saw in the existing impact fee ordinance

Because the fees are collected when building permits are issued, existing county residents who build new homes here must pay the .fee, while new county residents buying existing homes would not

.It's fundamentally unfair the way it works now," said Michael Crews"

The county cannot assess impact fees on new residents moving into existing homes, advised county attorney Terry Brown, but a .credit for existing residents building new homes in the county may be possible

It won't make a lot of difference," added Mercantile Bank president John Kennedy, who favored the moratorium, "but it certainly "

.won't hurt

.Commissioner Mark Hartley supported the measure, but only if the school board agreed to waiving its portion as well

.The only way I'll vote for a moratorium is to give us time to fix [the existing impact fee ordinance]," asserted Mr. Robinson"

Even though the county has sole authority over impact fees, commissioners instructed staff to seek support from school board .members

Mr. Cone said the following day that two ordinances could be drafted, one for a moratorium on the county's portion of the fee and a .second on the school district's portion

.If the school board doesn't want to do that, they could just vote the [second] ordinance down," he said"

:In other business that evening

The commission decided to table a rezoning request from the Florida Department of Corrections [FDOC] to accommodate an • .inmate re-entry facility on 64 acres on the south side of US 90 just west of the I-10 interchange with US 90

.The project has been opposed by Kenneth Moore and his family, who reside on an adjacent 80 acres

FDOC secretary Walter McNeil suggested a land swap between the state and the Baker County Economic Development .Commission, which owns about 160 acres in the area that doesn't abut Mr. Moore's land, as a possible compromise

.Commissioners continued the state's rezoning request until June 21 so staff could further investigate the land swap

.I think that's the best deal," Mr. Moore said of potential swap"

Commissioners also instructed staff to draft an ordinance exempting large lot divisions — those leaving parcels greater than 20 • .acres — from subdivision regulations that require platting and paving of dirt roads

Planning director Ed Preston said the ordinance would be written so that such parcels would not be eligible for so-called homestead division or family lots. Both refer to other provisions of the land development regulations that exempt certain parcels from subdivision .rules

Kevin Shell, one of three county residents on the St. Mary's River Management Committee, updated commissioners on the • .committee's activities, which include the annual river clean-up event every March

He said two vacancies remain on the committee for Baker County representatives. The remaining committee consists of five .members each from Nassau County, Charlton County, GA and Camden County, GA

. Anyone interested in serving on the committee should contact Mr. Shell by e-mail at [kdshell@necom.net](mailto:kdshell@necom.net)

The commission also approved the purchase of new lawn maintenance equipment for \$6199 and an EMS training dummy for •  
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