

County approves plan to share impact fees with the beach

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With little discussion and no opposition, the St. Johns County Commission approved a plan to share impact fees for roads and public buildings evenly with the city of St. Augustine Beach.

The original proposal would have allowed the Beach to keep 25 percent of the funds earmarked for roads and parks, and 75 percent of the law enforcement and public building portion of the impact fee.

The Beach City Commission during its meeting Monday night asked County Commission Chairman Bruce Maguire about the possibility of switching the percentages.

Beach Commissioner Barbara Ellis said growth would require more money for roads than for public buildings.

"Why not 50-50?" Maguire suggested.

The Beach Commission approved the even split by a 3-1 vote.

The dissenting vote came from Commissioner Don Terrill, who opposes all impact fees, saying they limit commercial development.

The beach commissioners were "within a 16th of an inch" of approving the change but decided to make the counteroffer first, then vote on the change in two weeks, Maguire said.

Maguire's fellow commissioners unanimously approved the change.

They also added the proviso that the agreement would be reviewed after a year to make sure the percentages "are appropriate for both sides," he said.

A 50-50 split would have provided "roughly" \$200,000 to the beach city last year, Maguire said Tuesday.

"That's not an astronomical number for the county, but (it is) for them," he said.

If this arrangement had been in effect two years ago, when the beach city collected almost \$500,000 in impact fees, Maguire added, it could have made a "significant" difference in the ad valorem tax rate.

The County Commission intends to use the agreement with the Beach in upcoming discussions with the city of St. Augustine and the town of Hastings.

"The plan is to use this model and then go to all three communities," Maguire said.

In other business, the commission denied an appeal of the Design Review Board's approval of a planned 14,560-square-foot Walgreen's at Ocean Trace on Anastasia Island.

Duke Snyder, representing the Ocean Trace Homeowners Association, said the pharmacy's plans don't meet all the code requirements for items such as yard size, roof style, buffering, signage and development standards.

A building as large as the one being planned is "urban mass that will reduce the quality of life and our property values," Snyder said.

"It is appropriate for highly dense commercial areas."

Several Ocean Trace residents said they didn't object to a commercial building.

But they do want one, they said, that conforms to the building code and won't add to the area's drainage problems.

After confirming the Walgreen's design with the planning staff, Vice Chairman James Bryant said he used to live in the Ocean Trace neighborhood,

"And I don't like to see that level of intensity."

"But the legal issues have been met," he added.

Maguire agreed.

"I don't think there's any justification here to overturn the decision," he said.

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