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County building fees may rise

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By [Hector Florin](#)*Palm Beach Post Staff Writer*

Wednesday, August 17, 2005

WEST PALM BEACH — County commissioners voted unanimously Tuesday to increase impact fees, one-time assessments tacked on to new properties that help pay for growth, by \$1,500 for most new homes.

But much of the discussion focused on how yet another price increase is adding to the county's struggles to develop affordable housing.

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Final approval of the fees will be considered at the Sept. 27 meeting.

Most owners of new homes will pay at least \$10,000 in impact fees, among the state's highest, according to the proposed figures.

Between now and September, commissioners said, there should be an emphasis on creating programs to keep buyers who can't afford \$400,000 homes, the median price in the county.

"We're going to have to figure something out," Commissioner Burt Aaronson said, as other officials noted that nurses, police officers and teachers are leaving the county in search of cheaper housing. These are "the people we need in this county to take care of the people in this county."

Although certain state grants can pay impact fees for eligible affordable housing candidates, Commissioner Mary McCarty suggested another fund, perhaps from property taxes, to help salaried professionals who buy homes in the \$225,000 price range.

Aaronson suggested a gradual, yearly increase in impact fees, perhaps tied to the consumer price index.

"The bite would be much less and the developers would not be, so to speak, kicking and screaming so much," he said.

Aaronson also expressed frustration at the lack of solutions for affordable housing.

"We've talked about it and talked about it for years," Aaronson said. "We have to bite the bullet. We have not done that."

Also at issue is the calculation used to determine how much owners of new homes pay for increased school enrollment fueled by growth.

The county, school board and the Gold Coast Builders Association are working with different figures. The groups hope to settle the issue before next month's meeting.

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