

Find out how you can get gas for \$1.99/gallon with the GM Fuel Price Protection program.



Program details >>
Residency restrictions apply

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/custom/growth/orl-limpact2806may28,0,1365052.story?coll=orl-news-growth-headlines>

County considers impact fee study

Payments have not kept up with the rising costs of building materials.

Nin-Hai Tseng
Sentinel Staff Writer

May 28, 2006

TAVARES -- The rising cost of asphalt, concrete and other construction materials has prompted county officials to ask whether impact fees that help pay for new fire services, roads, parks and libraries should be increased.

The county is considering a study to determine whether the fees should be raised to cope with the strain new residents place on public facilities and services. The one-time fees are commonplace in Florida and usually are passed on to homeowners.

"Construction costs for both roads and buildings have gone way up in the last few years, so logic will tell you that the fees could go up," said Wendy Wickwire, the county's impact-fee coordinator.

Wickwire and other county staffers met recently with consultants to talk about the scope of a proposed study. While construction costs are a concern, Lake's policies require a review of the fees for fire, parks and libraries every three years, and it's about time for a look, she said.

Lake, one of the fastest-growing counties in the country, has had road-impact fees since the mid-1980s. County officials have raised those fees a handful of times -- the latest in 2002, which called for phased-in increases and eventually put the fee for building a medium-size home from \$1,343 to \$2,189.

In 2003, county leaders approved incremental increases for impact fees for fire services and added new fees to help pay for parks and libraries, \$222 and \$191 per home, respectively.

Demand for fire services has been especially difficult to keep up with, officials said.

Public Safety Director Gary Kaiser said the county is in line to build four fire stations within the next 18 months, but the escalating costs of construction materials likely will double the expense.

The county raised \$1.25 million through impact fees for fire services in the past fiscal year, according to county records.

Kaiser said his department had estimated only a few years ago that building one fire station would cost \$1.2 million. That number, he said, is probably outdated.

"I would be surprised if the study didn't reveal we need an increase," Kaiser said.

In 2003, the fire-impact fee increased from \$130 to \$246 and is scheduled for incremental increases that will take it to \$390 by 2008.

Lake Engineering Director Fred Schneider, who helps plan the county's road projects, said he will let the study decide. Lake collected \$18.3 million in road-impact fees last fiscal year.

Schneider said he has already seen construction costs cause projects to go way over budget.

In February, bids awarded for construction of the South Clermont Connector came in about twice the original estimate of \$5 million to \$7 million. The four-lane road, which will shuttle traffic to U.S. Highway 27 and take vehicles off congested Lake Louisa Road and Lakeshore Drive, will cost \$13.1 million.

County officials blamed much of the rising cost on construction materials, particularly asphalt. Asphalt is petroleum based and, with the price of oil soaring, it has been difficult to keep up with rising prices, Schneider said.

Wickwire said the study -- if commissioners decide to do one -- could take up to six months. Whether officials decide to increase the fees will largely depend on the findings.

Jean Kaminski, executive director of the Homebuilders Association of Lake County, said impact fees only jack up the price for homeowners.

"It is the consumer who pays the fees -- it's not the developer who pays," Kaminski said.

Nin-Hai Tseng can be reached at nhtseng@orlandosentinel.com or 352-742-5919.

Copyright © 2006, [Orlando Sentinel](#) | [Get home delivery - up to 50% off](#)

Get your news *on the go* by going to www.orlandosentinel.com on your mobile browser.