



County hires expert to study impact fees

By Benjamin Price, News-Leader

The man who "wrote the book" on impact fees will add Nassau County to his long list of clients.

University of Florida professor Dr. James C. Nicholas has agreed to help the county put a price tag on new development by restructuring the county's impact fee ordinance.

Impact fees are charged to builders constructing new homes or businesses, and are a way for government to recoup some of the costs associated with population growth.

Nicholas said Wednesday he has not yet signed a contract, but confirmed the price would be about \$28,000.

County Attorney Mike Mullin made the announcement at Monday's Nassau County Commission meeting, and lauded Nicholas's track record and knowledge of the issue.

"That will be the best \$28,000 you'll ever spend," Mullin said. "He never gets challenged, and he basically created the impact fee model for the state of Florida."

Nicholas said Wednesday his task is to update the county's fee schedule to bring it in line with the current costs of growth.

"(The county's) impact fees are a few years old," he said. "They're using old costs and I can tell you, costs have changed dramatically. It's a matter of staying on top of them."

He expects to have his recommendations ready by November or December.

The county's current fees fall well short of covering the costs of new growth, and County Administrator Mike Mahaney has indicated they will have to be raised. It's one aspect of his four-part plan to make growth pay for itself, and which already includes a recently approved nickel gas tax and developer "fair share" agreements.

Last year the impact fee schedule nearly doubled in unincorporated parts of the county, where a builder is currently charged about \$2,400 per new home. The county is also considering adding a \$3,726-per-home school impact fee.

A public hearing concerning that fee is scheduled for 7 p.m. July 25 at the County Building on Pages Dairy Road in Yulee.

Nicholas is a professor of urban and regional planning at the University of Florida's Fredric G. Levin College of Law. He has published several professional journal articles on planning and impact fees, in addition to his book, *A Practitioner's Guide to Development Impact Fees*, published in 1991.

He has performed consultation work with governments around the country, including impact fee consultations with the city of Fernandina Beach, St. Johns and other Florida counties.

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