

County may share impact fees with Beach

Deal involves \$100,000 a year

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The St. Johns County Commission will decide today if it will make an offer that St. Augustine Beach commissioners may hesitate to refuse -- \$100,000 a year for the Beach's share of county impact fees.

That's triple what the city gets now. But to get the money, the Beach will be required to come on board with the county's new, higher impact fee schedule.

Assistant County Administrator Scott Clem said the county will propose a revenue sharing plan today that lets St. Augustine Beach keep 75 percent of the law enforcement and public building part of the total impact fee. The Beach also will keep 25 percent of road and parks impact fees.

"They will be able to retain some of the fees and spend it on projects," Clem said. "But the County Commission has to see the proposal first."

Right now, the Beach collects only a 3-percent administration cost that gives it about \$30,000 a year.

Mayor Frank Charles said the city has thought about opting out of the impact fee schedule, like St. Augustine.

"We have to think: Is this a fair amount?" he said. "My concern is more about how large an amount people are being charged than the amount the city is getting."

He said the city is still collecting the fees.

"But (if the city did opt out), developers might annex into the city because of the cost saving," he said. "The city could potentially do better due to growth."

Under the suggested proposal, impact fees for fire service would be kept by the county because the county funds Fire-Rescue.

School impact fees would go to the St. Johns County School District.

But the city will collect fees for public buildings, police protection, and receive a portion of road and park fees, as well as continue to collect the 3-percent administrative fee.

Clem said County Commission Chairman Bruce Maguire plans to attend the Beach's July 11 commission meeting to answer questions.

County documents indicate that from 1999 to 2004, the county collected \$42.65 million in impact fees.

Beach Commissioner Don Terrill, a past critic of impact fees, said Monday that he would not look favorably on that proposed arrangement.

Even though City Hall would collect more money, Terrill thinks it will stifle business growth because a commercial property under 100,000 square feet -- which covers most Beach businesses -- will be charged \$6,562 per 1,000 square feet. Until May 1, those properties were charged \$2,127 per 1,000 square feet.

"Commercial property is very expensive here," Terrill said. "It's not feasible for anybody to pay that much for the property and then pay high impact fees on top of it. We don't need impact fee money. We need development."

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