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## County more than doubles government building impact fee

By Larry Hannan

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A dramatic increase in Collier County's government building impact fee will go into effect Nov. 1.

Collier commissioners unanimously approved the impact fee increase Tuesday. Under the increase, an impact fee for a 2,000-square-foot single-family home will go up from \$282 to \$807, an increase of \$525.

The government building impact fee went into effect in 2004.

County consultants say the increase is needed because of the rising cost of land and construction in the past two years.

"It now costs \$300 to \$350 per square foot to buy land," said the commissioners' consultant, Steve Tindale, president of Tindale-Oliver & Associates Inc. "It used to be \$100 to \$150."

That dramatic increase in land cost required a dramatic increase in the impact fee, Tindale said.

Money collected from the fee goes toward constructing government buildings that provide services to new residents.

Impact fees are one-time assessments on new construction that are intended to make growth pay for growth. They are assessed for each new home and business built in the county and paid by developers, who typically pass them on to consumers in the form of higher prices.

Collier now has 10 impact fees. The fees also are charged for roads, parks, schools, fire departments, jail facilities and emergency medical services, water, sewers and law enforcement.

The cost of all impact fees is now about \$30,000 for someone building a 2,000-square-foot single-family home.

The Collier Building Industry Association sued county government after the original government building impact fee was approved in 2004. CBIA contended the impact fee was unconstitutional.

The lawsuit was dropped earlier this year. CBIA officials said they still believed the impact fee was wrong, but the suit had damaged the organization's ability to deal with Collier County officials, and they wanted to move beyond that.

Contacted after the meeting Tuesday, CBIA Director Brenda Talbert said the impact fee increase was another sign that the county didn't care about creating more affordable housing.

The building industry is willing to pay a fair amount in impact fees, but the county's current impact fees are ridiculously excessive, Talbert said.

CBIA has opposed these impact fees and argued they make it more difficult to build affordable housing, but

the fees keep being raised as high as they can go.

“We’re not opposed to paying for growth,” Talbert said. “But I think at this point CBIA is exhausted from fighting (the impact fees).”

The county also lowered the property tax rate at Tuesday’s meeting, a decision that drew scorn from Talbert.

“These impact fees are designed to avoid raising property taxes,” Talbert said.

At one point during the discussion, the commissioners digressed into a discussion on how to make sure impact fee deferrals weren’t given to illegal aliens.

After a long discussion, it was agreed that anyone applying for a deferral would have to produce a U.S. passport, a certificate of U.S. citizenship or a certificate of naturalization to prove he or she is in the country legally.

Commissioners told staff to come back to them if this requirement ended up making things difficult for people who were in the country legally.

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