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## County set to adopt impact fees

Impact fees to help cope with growth

DESOTO COUNTY -- The DeSoto County Commission has endorsed a plan to establish impact fees in DeSoto County.

The board made several adjustments to the plan presented in a workshop Thursday and will vote on an ordinance enacting the impact fees at the Feb. 28 meeting of the board. During the workshop, the board agreed to reduce proposed impact fees by 25 percent.

The board has determined that public revenues generated from new growth and development in DeSoto County will not generate sufficient funds to provide for the expansion of certain capital facilities necessary to accommodate new growth and development.

Months ago board members indicated they would prefer utilizing impact fees to cope with rapid growth, rather than raising taxes in general.

Impact fees, sometimes called development fees, are expenditures that developers -- individual or corporate -- are required to pay as a precondition to board approval of their project. Impact fees are generally used to finance roads, schools, affordable housing, transit systems and other public projects.

The fees are frequently passed on by developers to purchasers in the price of a new property and therefore tend to increase the cost of housing and decrease the profitability of a particular project. However, many developers favor impact fees as providing infrastructure that promotes sales.

The board heard an impact fee presentation on the proposed impact fees from Duane Guthrie of TischlerBise, a consulting firm the board hired about a year ago to help the board conduct an impact fee study.

The new growth and development in the county is expected to continue into the

foreseeable future, placing ever-increasing demands on the county's infrastructure needs.

Tischler's proposed ordinance calls for six county-wide services and facilities to be funded by impact fees: 1) road facilities, 2) fire/rescue facilities, 3) general government facilities, 4) library facilities, 5) park facilities and 6) Sheriff's facilities.

Tischler proposed a set of impact fees for each of the facilities and calculated how much revenue would be generated by impact fees. For example, the proposed fees would fund 18.42 miles of major roads at an estimated cost of \$25.6 million over the next five years. Fees could produce funding for a new fire station and four additional fire-fighting vehicles. Law enforcement could benefit, with funding enough to build a new building, buy 14 additional vehicles, and fund nearly 7,000 square feet of jail expansion.

The proposed fee schedule for new residences was based on square footage, with a minimum area of 900 square feet of floor area, calling for a minimum impact fee of \$5,044, and a maximum area of 2,800 square feet, calling for a maximum impact of \$13,457.

The board agreed to reduce all the figures on the proposed schedule by 25 percent, which would reduce the above figures to \$3,783 for a minimum floor area and \$10,093 for a maximum floor area. A medium-sized house of 1,400 square feet would require a \$6,241 impact fee.

The board will have the authority to decrease or increase the fees in accordance with need.

Anyone who commences any impact-generating land development, unless included in an exempted category, will have to pay impact fees. The fees would have to be paid prior to the issuance of a building permit. Certain types of development will be exempt from payment of impact fees. An example would be the reconstruction, expansion or replacement of a previously existing residential unit that does not increase the number of bedrooms.

Impact fees also apply to impact-generating land development undertaken by public school boards. The DeSoto County school board is presently studying impact fees to help finance school structures.

Of DeSoto County's neighboring counties, Charlotte, Manatee and Sarasota have impact fees. Highlands, Hardee and Okeechobee do not, but are considering them.

Total impact fee costs for new residences will be the county fee plus the schoolboard

fee.

Under the proposed plan, Arcadia city residents would be included in the impact fee ordinance, but would pay lower rates.

The board altered the plan submitted by Tischler in three ways:

- \* The fees proposed by Tischler were reduced by 25 percent.
- \* An exemption for families already living in DeSoto County was adopted.
- \* The parks category was removed.

All the commissioners were present at the workshop and all came to a unanimous informal consensus on the final form of the ordinance.


The ordinance will be considered for passage at a public hearing during the board's February 28 meeting at 6:30 p.m.

The board hopes to implement the impact fee system on May 1.

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