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County studies education impact fee

OCALA - The cost of building a single-family home in Marion County will increase substantially if a proposed education impact fee is approved.

If the fee recommended by the School Board is approved, the impact fee for single-family dwellings could be as high as \$8,700, and \$14,000 for a multi-family building, and \$2,200 for a mobile home.

Steve Barrett, executive director of business services for the school district, used Orange County's methodology and Marion County figures to develop a formula for the impact fee, a one-time charge on new homes.

Tuesday, Superintendent of Schools Jim Yancey plans to bring a recommendation to the School Board to hire a legal firm to conduct an impact fee study.

Currently, 21 of Florida's school districts charge impact fees. Osceola County, which charges \$9,800 per home, has the highest school impact fee in the state for new single-family homes. Lake County charges \$7,055, Orange County charges \$7,000, and Citrus County charges \$1,800.

School Board members have been reluctant to impose impact fees in the past, but agree a fee is necessary to offset the costs associated with building more schools to accommodate rapid growth.

Last year, voters approved a half-cent sales tax to build six new schools, but escalating construction costs are making it impossible to fund them all.

The county commissioners, who approve impact fees, asked the board to come up with a formula for developers that would help pay for school construction costs, after board members complained they have little say when developments in the city and county are approved.

A handful of developers and builders attending a school board work session Wednesday didn't support the proposed fees.

"Impact fees is certainly not the answer. It's going to take you 10 years to get

what you need," said Mitzi Perry, executive director of the Marion County Home Builders Association, "You need a contingency plan. I think you need a bond. I think you need to borrow now, not tomorrow because costs are not going to go down."

Jay Thompson, president of Pulte Homes, believes new people moving into the city or county should pay their way and developers should pay to support the impacts that they are creating, but the numbers are huge. He said the fee currently proposed for multi-family dwellings would absolutely shut down the apartment buildings.

"What we would support is an impact fee that is calculable, defensible, reasonable and a substantial aggressive bonding program," he said. "What we do not want to see is an impact fee put in place and a dribble of construction to catch up with this problem in 10 years. It's not the fees."

Yancey said the district based their numbers on Orange County's calculations but stressed the figures are not final, but the best they have right now. He said what drove the figures is they are based on current construction costs.

"We had to use some kind of standard methodology. We're doing the best we can with the methodology that we think is appropriate only because it's been challenged in court," he said. "There's no doubt in my mind that it's going to be challenged, but we are going to make sure that we get a lawyer so that when we do recommend an impact fee, whatever it is, it will stand up in court."

Yancey said if someone has a real formula that's worked in another school district, the district would like to see it. He said the study is expected to take 90 days to complete.

"We have a daunting task ahead of us," added Sue Mosley, School Board Chairwoman.

Monica Bryant can be reached at (352) 867-4131 or monica.bryant@starbanner.com.
