

## County's new plan could replace road impact fees with higher fees

**The more expensive "multi-modal mitigation" fees would fund roads, bicycle and pedestrian paths and a proposed bus rapid transit system.**

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Published: Saturday, January 22, 2011 at 5:54 p.m.

The last piece of the puzzle in Alachua County's plan to shift future growth toward densely built multi-use developments also is the piece most likely to cause waves within the area's building industry.

For future development, it would do away with transportation impact fees levied on new development to fund road projects and replace them with more expensive "multi-modal mitigation" fees, which would fund construction of roads, bicycle and pedestrian paths, and a proposed bus rapid transit system.

Depending on the type of development, the cost increase over current road impact fees could be substantial.

For a single-family home in an exclusively residential subdivision, county staff's current proposal would be a 64 percent increase from the current road impact fee of \$2,073 per 1,000 square feet to \$3,400.

Final step

With development essentially dormant in a down economy, that increase has rankled some in the building industry.

"Our position, in general, is it's not time to be raising fees when 15 to 20 counties in the state are putting moratoriums on fees," said Jen Volz, secretary at the Builders Association of North Central Florida.

On the other hand, the multi-modal mitigation fee is the last required piece for the Florida Department of Community Affairs to release the county from state road concurrency in urban areas and allow two years of planning for a shift in development and transportation patterns to move ahead.

"Without this, all the work we've been doing to this point is kind of fruitless," said Jonathan Paul, the county's Concurrency and Impact Fee manager.

Several proposed developments — Newberry Village, Celebration Pointe, SpringHills and SantaFe Village — cannot move forward without the fee in place, Paul said.

Each is planned as a transit-oriented development, which would mix residential and retail space and have dedicated lanes and stops for the bus rapid transit system.

The transit system has been long-discussed but is still years from reality.

Without the multi-modal fee in place, the projects would remain subject to state road concurrency requirements and their developers would have to pay a proportionate fair share toward road-widening projects and new road constructions deemed necessary to accommodate their traffic.

That cost would be an "obscene" amount more than the developments would contribute through the multi-modal fee, said county Growth Management Director Steve Lachnicht.

Adam Bolton, president of residential development company Robinshore Inc. and former president of the Builders Association of North Central Florida, opposes the fee increase but supports the associated move away from concurrency.

He says the move would again allow development along the congested Newberry Road and Archer Road corridors.

"For the development community, allowing development is better than not," Bolton said. "We'd rather allow people to do projects than not, and that is what the switch to multi-modal allows to occur instead of what we have now, which is a de facto moratorium on development."

'Anemic' building

Still, Bolton felt the county should put the brakes on the changes and not increase fees while building is "anemic."

Bolton also wanted to wait and see what changes to state growth management laws, including concurrency, come out of Gov. Rick Scott and the Legislature.

Scott has previously argued that the Florida Department of Community Affairs, which enforces concurrency, was "killing jobs" across the state.

Speaking further on the county's plans for future growth, Bolton believed the proposed mixed-use transit-oriented and traditional neighborhood developments encouraged an "auto-unfriendly development pattern" with regulations that limited the number of parking spaces and drive-thru lanes.

Lachnicht said the county did not intend or expect residents to give up their cars.

They could, however, reduce the reliance on cars with a mix of residential, retail and office uses in a single development, he said.

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