



Data On Impact Fees Questioned

By MICHAEL D. BATES

Hernando Today

Published: June 26, 2008

BROOKSVILLE - County Commissioner David Russell took exception to some of the data presented by planning department staffers during Tuesday's discussion on a proposed 25 percent impact fee reduction.

Russell said the board needs to consider the "here and now" and not concern itself with outdated statistics, which he believes the board got Tuesday. He also questioned the hard-line stance Planning Director Ron Pianta and his staff took to the proposal, which backers say will stimulate a faltering local economy.

"It appeared to me that staff was adamantly opposed to it, and I think (their) numbers might have been reflective of that attitude," Russell said.

Commissioners on Tuesday voted 5-0 to set a public hearing for July 15 to discuss what kinds of economic stimulus - if any - would occur if they were to reduce impact fees on new construction by 25 percent across-the-board.

Commissioners said there were too many unanswered questions and wanted staff to come back with more answers

Pianta on Tuesday told commissioners there is no conclusive evidence to suggest a reduction in impact fees would stimulate home construction or make home ownership more affordable.

He cited statistics to bolster his claim.

Pianta said the county's development department issued 6,364 permits and collected \$14.4 million in impact fees from Dec. 1, 2006 to May 5.

Using past collections as a benchmark, the county would stand to lose \$3.6 million if commissioners approved an across-the-board 25 percent impact fee reduction.

That would have a major effect on the county's ability to fund adopted capital improvement projects, Pianta said, citing statistics compiled by his department.

However, a check with the county's development department shows that only 1,083 single-family permits were issued for the 18-month period cited by Pianta.

Contacted Wednesday, Pianta said the 6,364 permits do not represent "actual individual permits." Rather, they are the number of "hits" on permits.

Put another way, it is the number of times an impact fee got assessed to a permit - and that number includes residential and nonresidential construction, he said.

Asked whether the state's affordable housing appropriation act, recently signed into law by Gov. Charlie Crist to help jumpstart the economy, would be applied across-the-board to all five impact fee funds, Pianta said he didn't have the answer to that yet.

"We're trying to get that clarified," he said.

However, Russell said perhaps it would have been prudent to have more answers to the state's bill before Pianta offered statistics and conclusions as to its feasibility.

Russell, a former state legislator, said he has read the bill and it is clear to him.

"It doesn't matter what (fee) categories you reduce as long as there is a 25 percent reduction in impact fees," Russell said. "It doesn't say individual fees. It says impact fees."

The only murky area is whether the program applies to commercial as well as residential, he said.

Russell called the 6,364 permits cited by Pianta irrelevant.

What's important is that the county pulled only 141 single family permits from Jan. 1 through May 31, he said.

"Regardless of what was pulled in the past, we're looking at the here and now," Russell said. "And there is very little in the way of impact fees being collected now."

The act sets aside \$20 million in nonrecurring funds for the next fiscal year - beginning July 1 - for a 12-month period.

And the only thing required of Hernando County to get that money is to reduce impact fees 25 percent for a period of 18 months, he said.

Once passed, Russell said the county could review the program every six months to see if it is working.

"If we don't see any improvement, we can terminate the program," he said.

County Commissioner Rose Rocco said she believes an impact fee reduction would be a positive for people who are sitting on the fence and wondering whether to buy a home.

This would get them in that house paying taxes and spending money in the area, further stimulating the economy, she said.

Rocco agreed there was conflicting information presented Tuesday and not enough concrete

data from staff.

"If you're going to vote on something, you have to know if you're voting on something solid," she said.

Rocco hopes to see "hard numbers" from the planning staff and all other stakeholders at the July 15 public hearing.

"A stimulus package is a good thing if it's going to work to the best interests of the community as a whole," she said.

As County Administrator David Hamilton said of Tuesday's impact fee discussion: "There was a lot of data but not enough information."

Reporter Michael D. Bates can be reached at 352-544-5290 or mbates@hernandotoday.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www2.hernandotoday.com/content/2008/jun/26/ha-data-on-impact-fees-questioned>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

©2008 Media General Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Member agreement](#) and [privacy statement](#)