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**02/18/06**

## **DeSoto School Board considers impact fees**

DESOTO COUNTY -- The DeSoto County Commission recently agreed about an ordinance implementing an impact-fee system to help finance some of the rapid growth and development facing DeSoto County.

The DeSoto County School Board may soon follow suit.

If impact fees are adopted by both governments, the final impact fee levied on a new structure in DeSoto County will be a combined figure of county and school board impact fees.

Impact fees, sometimes called development fees, are expenditures that developers -- individual or corporate -- are required to pay as a precondition to approval of their project.

Only new housing units generate school impact fees. In contrast, ongoing revenues like property taxes are paid by existing development, plus new development that is added each year.

Impact fees are generally used to finance roads, schools, affordable housing, transit systems and other public projects.

Impact fees are one-time payments and are almost invariably passed on by developers to purchasers through the price of a new property and, therefore, tend to increase the cost of housing and decrease the profitability of a particular project.

For school impact fees, the cost would be included in the price of land and new school buildings.

The School Board has hired the same consultant, TischlerBise, the county uses to help with proposed impact fees.

According to TischlerBise, as DeSoto continues to grow, it faces a revenue shortfall for

school capacity needs. Impact fees may be the answer.

The School Board's consultant says impact fees could provide significant funding for growth issues in DeSoto County.

Impact fees would apply only to new construction and could not be used for operating costs or the replacement of existing capital items, such as air conditioners.

The average size of all housing unit construction during the last 10 years in DeSoto County is 1,400 square feet of heated space. Under a maximum supportable impact fee schedule proposed for study, such a house would sustain a maximum school impact fee of \$4,407.

Potential impact fee revenue depends on two factors: the number of housing units constructed each year, and the fee level adopted by the School Board and county commissioners.

Both boards have had impact fee studies conducted by consultants. Impact fee studies identify the maximum supportable fees based upon a technical analysis and legal guidelines applicable to impact fees.

Elected officials, for several reasons, may choose to implement a fee schedule that is less than the maximum supportable amounts.


TischlerBise recommends that DeSoto County place impact fee funds into a separate fund which can be used only for the purposes authorized by the impact fee ordinance.

School Board impact fees must be approved by the County Commission.

The county's impact fee ordinance will be considered for passage at a public hearing during the board's Feb. 28 meeting at 6:30 p.m. The board will consider school impact fees March 28.

**By JOHN LAWHORNE**

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