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Environmental group opposes reduced impact fees

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MANATEE -- A local environmental watchdog group warns Manatee County will be a "less desirable place to live" if the county commission approves a plan to extend impact fee reductions.

Manasota-88, a group of volunteer activists based in Nokomis, sent a letter to county commissioners Friday opposing county Administrator Ed Hunzeker's proposal to extend transportation and education impact fee reductions for two years.

Commissioners will take up the proposal during a regular meeting at 9 a.m. today at commission chambers, 1112 Manatee Ave. W.

The letter takes Hunzeker to task for saying the extension is necessary to do "no harm" to a slowly recovering local economy.

"In fact, the opposite will occur, Manatee County will become a less desirable place to live because new school construction and transportation projects will continue to be under funded," the letter from Manasota-88 Chairman Glenn Compton read.

Impact fees are one-time costs designed to pass on the burden of constructing roads, parks and schools to developers of new homes and businesses.

A 50 percent cut in transportation impact fees and 100 percent cut in educational impact fees adopted in May 2009 are set to expire July 26.

Hunzeker's proposal would extend the reductions through July 26, 2013, and create a loss of \$12 million in capital improvement revenue the county would have received.

The School District of Manatee County also supports Hunzeker's plan, although it will cost the district about \$5 million that could have been used for new school buildings.

Manasota-88 encouraged commissioners to make sure developers pay their fair share.

"Nearly everyone now recognizes that those who benefit from fast development should at least pay for it, rather than having the cost hidden in everyone's property tax bill," the letter said.

Commission Chairman Carol Whitmore said she supports Hunzeker's proposal. The impact fee reduction passed by a 6-1 vote in 2009. The lone dissenter in 2009, Commissioner Joe McClash, said he will vote against the extension as well.

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