



Nassau County Record

Fee moratorium continues

*By Ryan Smith
For the Record*

The Nassau County Commission voted Dec. 13 to continue the county's moratorium on impact fees for another year.

At Commissioner Danny Leeper's suggestion, the commission also voted to create a task force to investigate whether to rescind the fees permanently at the end of that time.

Impact fees are charged to developers and used to help pay for new growth. The commission first voted to suspend the fees in June 2008 in an effort to stimulate the local economy. The original moratorium was slated at six months, but the commission has continued to renew it since then.

At the meeting, local developers said reinstating the fees would have a chilling effect on economic growth.

"This economy has not gotten better. This is not the time to bring these impact fees back," said Chris Hagan of the Northeast Florida Builders Association. "This is really not the right system to support funding for road improvements. ... I would ask this commission to continue the moratorium on impact fees for a year."

"Impact fees do, in fact, curb development," said Mike Herzberg, also of the Northeast Florida Builders Association. "The current fee structure is cost-prohibitive to kick-start job growth."

Adding impact fees to the cost of new construction, Herz-berg claim-ed, could cut new businesses' profits enough that they might hesitate to open in the county. That would cost the county government tax revenue and keep new jobs from being created, he said.

"Do you want nothing to go on for a period of years, or would you rather say, 'Let's get those jobs in here and maybe get this economy turned around?'" he said. "I can assure you that when developers are considering projects and looking at these numbers, they're saying, 'You know what? It doesn't work.'"

Leeper said the en-tire impact fee system needs to be reconsidered.

"We can sit here to-night and do two things," he said. "We could reinstate (the fees), but what sense does that make? Or we could suspend them for another three months, six months or even another year, but then we'll be right back here having this conversation."

Instead, Leeper proposed extending the moratorium for another year and creating an 11-member task force to consider revamping the impact fee system.

"They'll be charged with evaluating the existing system ... and any alternative funding sources, and bring back a recommendation," he said. "If we can get this started this month and they could convene in January, we're looking at ... October to finalize a recommendation. In December, we'd really have an ordinance that can benefit the people of this county."

"One point I want to make is that it's not just development and fees - it is about jobs," Commissioner Stacy Johnson said. "... This is one form of incentive that we can offer to businesses coming to Nassau County. Commissioner Leeper, I think this is a phenomenal idea."

Commissioner Barry Holloway, who questioned the wisdom of suspending the fees in 2008, also supported Leeper's plan - on the condition that developers realized the task force could bring back a recommendation to reinstate the fees.

"I remember asking builders how many shovels they were going to put in the ground tomorrow if we waived impact fees (in 2008), and they said zero," he said. "They were very honest about it - they were looking down the road."

"I commend you, Commissioner Leeper, for bringing this forward," he added. "I think it's a great idea. I would support this for one year as long as we go in with one eye open."

The commission voted 5-0 to continue the moratorium and create the task force.