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## Hernando County leaders want to shrink or erase impact fees

By Barbara Behrendt, Times Staff Writer

*Leaders favor cutting fees for single-family homes, erasing them for some remodels.*

BROOKSVILLE - With the local economy at a standstill, the Hernando County Commission on Tuesday decided that a further reduction in impact fees is needed to jump-start construction activity.

Commissioners decided by consensus to roll back fees to 1999 levels and drop the fee for remodeling nonresidential buildings that are more than 5 years old.

Formal action on the fees, which would remain in effect until Nov. 30, 2012, will come at an upcoming commission meeting.

In 2009, commissioners tried to turn around the stalled construction industry by dropping fees to 2001 levels. That lowered the impact fee for a single-family residence from about \$9,200 to \$4,900. With the commissioners' move Tuesday, the fee would drop to \$2,948.

Impact fees are a one-time levy on new construction to offset some of the costs of expanding infrastructure, such as roads, parks and libraries.

Brooksville resident Richard Ross, long a foe of lowering impact fees, said that if the county transferred to current residents the cost of building infrastructure to keep up with growth, "it's a tax increase."

In these extraordinary economic times, he suggested, the commission could promote building in areas where infrastructure already exists - such as empty lots in mostly built-up areas - and remodeling of commercial buildings by eliminating impact fees in those cases.

Commissioner Jeff Stabins said that approach made sense to him.

The fee for renovating older buildings for commercial use could be dropped, said Ron Pianta, director of land services. But he cautioned against creating a tiered system of impact fees for residential areas. That would require an analysis to make the fees safe from legal challenge.

Facing a deadline to decide whether to keep the impact fee schedule, which expires Nov. 30, or adopt a new one, commissioners decided there was not enough time to have a complex discussion. But County

Administrator David Hamilton said they might consider a future workshop to discuss how to use impact fees to shape land use.

Commissioner Dave Russell said he was "a big fan of urban in-fill," but the problem is defining who would qualify for a fee reduction.

"There is always someone on the other side of the line," he said.

Commissioner John Druzbeck said that while he would not favor eliminating impact fees for everyone, he was interested in helping businesses trying to remodel nonresidential buildings. For some, he said, the impact fee might keep them from getting the loan they need to open their business.

Several residents spoke against lowering the fees.

Chris Glover of the Hernando Builders Association urged commissioners to keep the reduced fees or go still lower.

Ross spoke out a second time against the lower fees for residential construction, noting that the previous fee reductions have not helped home building. What's really needed, he said, is a concerted effort to get businesses to move to Hernando County.

"That's what we've got to do to survive," he said.

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#### Redistricting talks continue

In a joint workshop Tuesday, the Hernando County Commission and the School Board agreed to continue studying two plans for redistricting.

After every 10-year census, the boards must redraw district lines for the election of their members to equalize the number of residents in each.

The group settled on an option presented by the county planning staff, with some further modifications in the Spring Hill area, and also agreed to consider a plan presented by the NAACP once the organization provides more detail.

The county option would keep all of the sitting commissioners and all of the announced candidates in their districts, with the exception of recently announced District 3 candidate Jason Sager. The NAACP plan would carve the residence of District 1 incumbent Jeff Stabins out of his district.

The County Commission is expected to discuss the matter again on Nov. 15.

#### by the numbers

**\$9,200** Impact fee for a single-family home in 2009

**\$4,900** Impact fee after it was lowered to 2001 levels in 2009 for the same home

**\$2,948** New impact fee the County Commission adopted on Tuesday for that same home

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