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Hernando to keep reduced impact fees in place another year

By Barbara Behrendt, Times Staff Writer

BROOKSVILLE - Hernando County will keep its residential and commercial impact fees at 2001 levels for another year, the County Commission decided Tuesday.

Enacted 10 months ago, the impact fee reductions were set to end on Nov. 30. Figures compiled by county staffers showed that in the past 10 months, 134 single-family home permits were pulled compared with 105 for the same period last year.

Commercial impact fees didn't show the same kind of increase. They dragged overall permit numbers down to 179 in the past 10 months, compared to 208 from the previous year.

Builders insisted that the lower impact fees have been the convincing factor for some home buyers and that every bit of help is needed in the slow housing market.

"It's made a difference in my business," said home builder Bob Eaton. "If we continue it 12 more months, I think it will help."

"This will help to get us back through for another year," said Mark Alexander of Alexander Custom Homes.

But some area residents disagreed.

Janey Baldwin said the commission did a favor last year for builders and Realtors, and it was time to do a favor to taxpayers and put the fees back to their previous level.

Anthony Palmieri said he didn't see that the decrease had caused a real uptick in building. "It hasn't done us any good," he said.

Dropping the fees to 2001 levels made the single-family home fee \$4,800 compared to the previous fee of \$9,200. Impact fees are the one-time costs builders pay to governments to offset some of the impacts on public services caused by increased growth.

County numbers showed that in the past 10 months, the county collected \$895,675 in impact fees compared to \$3,452,367 in the previous year.


Former county commissioner Len Tria urged the board to extend the impact fee reduction. Each extra home built puts another 20 people to work, he argued. Those dollars get put back into the local economy, he said.

"You don't really get anything by chasing business away," he said.

The commissioners voted unanimously in favor of keeping the lower fees but will formalize that vote next month.

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