

Higher impact fees on new homes coming Oct. 1 in Martin

By George Andreassi

Tuesday, June 15, 2010

STUART — Despite calls from business leaders to keep the current low impact fees on new construction until the economy improves, Martin County commissioners decided to go forward with higher fees as of Oct. 1.

Martin County commissioners voted 3-2 to affirm their March 16 approval of an updated set of impact fees to increase the county's revenues in the 2011 budget year.

"These impact fees don't begin to cover the true costs of impacts (of new construction)," said Commissioner Sarah Heard. "We're not allowed to."

The new fees for most new business-related building will be lower than the fees in effect between Oct. 1, 2005, and July 15, 2009, county records show. However, the new fees for new houses will still be 31 percent higher than the 2005 fees.

However, the temporary suspension of all impact fees, except those for roads, will continue through the end of the 2010 budget year on Sept. 30.

Commission Chairman Doug Smith urged the commission to extend the current arrangement to boost the local economy.

"There is not a person in the construction industry that I know that has not taken a major hit to their business," Smith said. "Our local folks that are continuing to try to hang on ... are looking for every little piece of help they can get."

The county's Impact Fee Review Committee met May 19 and recommended that the county stick with the policy of collecting only road impact fees, which are needed to pay back loans for several road construction projects.

"We want things to happen here in Martin County that will encourage development, encourage jobs and really protect people from being charged fees that really are not necessary here in Martin County," said Jody Foster, a marine issues lawyer and member of the Impact Fee Review Committee.

The impact fees are based on 2008 construction costs, which have declined dramatically in the past two years, said Foster and Tyson Waters, a land-use lawyer and chairman of the Impact Fee Review Committee.

Small businesses need the continued relief from thousands of dollars to persuade them to expand if the economy improves, Waters said.

“I think the Impact Fee Committee people were optimistic that the markets have hit bottom and hopefully, with a little bit of a kick, we’re going to stimulate some kind of expansion or some encouragement for small businesses, give them a little bit of a break to get them going and give them a reason to expand their facilities,” Waters said.

NEW HOME IMPACT FEES

The impact fee proposal would raise the cost of a new house by almost \$5,000:

Impact fees for a single-family house between 1,101 and 2,300 square feet

.....2005.....Current.....Proposed 2011

Roads:..... \$2,793.....\$4,272.....\$4,209

Public buildings:..... \$436.....\$0.....\$487

Law enforcement:..... \$444.....\$0.....\$423

Emergency services... \$346.....\$0.....\$355

Parks:..... \$2,345.....\$0.....\$2,969

Libraries:..... \$456.....\$0.....\$515

Administration:..... \$136.....\$0.....\$134

County Total:..... \$6,956.....\$4,272.....\$9,092



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