

Hundreds of Indian River County property owners eligible for impact fee refunds

By Henry A. Stephens

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INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — Bill Furr, a resident of Painted Bunting Lane in Vero Beach, is excited to see if he gets a notice from the county that could mean an extra \$1,500 in the bank in the form of a refunded impact fee he never actually paid.

"To me, this would be like a gift from heaven," he said Tuesday. "It's great. It's nothing we'd ever expected."

And Furr won't be alone. In the next week or so, hundreds of other property owners, from Beachland Boulevard south to the Indian River-St. Lucie County line, can expect county notices informing them they're eligible to get shares refunded from \$1.1 million in impact fees and interest that have sat unspent in an account since 1999.

In a 5-0 vote Tuesday, county commissioners approved issuing notices to hundreds of property owners in the South Beach area and paying the refunds to those who respond with an application by September.

County Community Development Director Bob Keating tallied 462 property owners eligible for refunds, but said he used a lesser interest rate than the 6 percent the commission approved. He said he expects to have the final list ready by Friday, adding that will be fewer people with the new interest rate.

"I'm very happy and grateful on behalf of several hundred people that the County Commission finally approved refunds for (that district)," former political candidate Charlie Wilson said.

Wilson, the largest shareholder of Vero Beach's Asset Research and Recovery Inc. and sole owner of Impact Fee Consultants, has been trying for more than a year to get the commission to refund unspent impact fees. The two companies together have about 200 clients.

Impact fees are one-time charges the county levies on new homes and businesses, as well as expansions, to offset the increased costs in services required by new growth. Typically builders pay the impact fees and pass them onto buyers in the price of a home.

The \$1.1 million come from the \$255,289 left from money collected between 1986 and 1999 in the South Beach district and the \$868,186 in accumulated interest since then, county Budget Director Jason Brown said.

Although those fees were collected through 1999, sometimes by owners who have sold and moved since then, county officials say, the current owners — such as Furr — are the ones who would get the refunds.

Ordinances already allowed the county to refund the fees if the county didn't spend the money on new roads or other infrastructure in six years. The same ordinances gave people a year to apply for refunds. But the problem, Wilson said, was the ordinances didn't require the county to notify property owners they could apply for a refund because the county's six years were up. THE ORIGINAL INTENT Indian River County Administrator Joe Baird said the impact fees collected from the South Beach area were earmarked for widening the intersection of State Road A1A and 17th Street in Vero Beach.

County Public Works Director Chris Mora has said the intersection project was delayed because of problems getting right of way.

Still, County Commissioner Peter O'Bryan said Tuesday he wants the refund notices to include boxes so property owners could check, "I want my money to go toward the road."

Commissioner Wesley Davis found that unlikely: "If you do get a response like that, I want to see it."



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