

Impact fee cut means teacher layoffs, Pasco schools warn

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NEW PORT RICHEY - A plan to create hundreds of new jobs in Pasco County's beleaguered homebuilding business could cost hundreds of people in the school district their jobs, teachers included. That is the dilemma facing Pasco County Commissioners.

"We have to be Solomon for everybody," commission chair Ann Hildebrand remarked.

Commissioners are considering a 50-percent cut in the impact fee home developers pay to help fund new school construction. Builders say they need the fee reduction to save what's left of their business.

"You can say it's the worst I've ever seen it in my lifetime," builder Alex Deeb said.

Deeb acknowledged he and other builders had 10 unprecedented years of growth. He added Pasco County's impact fees are the highest in the state, making it difficult to attract new homebuyers.

"The problem is Pasco is competing with Hillsborough and Hernando," he continued. "They're right across the line and they're just less expensive than us."

Educators say they will suffer if the fees are cut.

"We cannot put developers' interest over the interest our citizenry, our students, and our public," United School Employees of Pasco president Lynne Webb told commissioners at a special joint meeting with the school district.

What's more, administrators say, developers have never paid their fair share of impact fees. When people were moving into newly built homes in Pasco County in record numbers, the school district asked the county commission the double the impact fee used to build new schools. The commission said no.

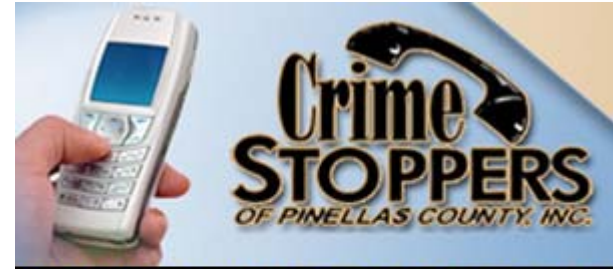
The current proposal would be to cut education impact fees from \$4,828.00 to \$2,414.00 for a little more than two years.

If commissioners go along with cutting the existing fee, educators say they'll have no choice but to launch massive layoffs.

"We are definitely talking about teachers," Superintendent Heather Fiorentino said. "We are talking about administrators; we're talking about across the board."

The school district is already facing a projected \$60-million cut in state funding.

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