

Impact fee questions – Polk Commission Watch - The Lakeland Ledger - Lakeland, FL - Archive

Here we go again. Polk County Commissioners were scheduled to have yet another discussion about whether the county's water and sewer connection fees were excessive Monday when Commission Chairman Bob English called it off.

He told commissioners instead to read the study the county staff had prepared and if they have any questions, the discussion can go from there.

The genesis of the session was to followup on a claim, which Polk utility officials have since refuted, by a local builder during one of the development community's periodic presentations before the commission.

The builder claimed Polk's impact fees for water and sewer were way out of line with what was being charged in Hillsborough County, a ploy to persuade Polk commissioners to lower the fee.

As it turns out the total fee in Hillsborough County is close to the fee charged in Polk County and Polk's charges are pretty much in the middle of the pack among other counties and cities in Florida.

It's probably worth taking a minute to remind everyone what impact fees are. They are charges against new development to help to defray the cost of improving utility systems, roads, schools, parks etc. as a result of the increased demands on these facilities the new development brings.

The amount of fees have to directly related to the actual impact the new development causes and the money has to be used specifically for the purpose it is levied.

During Monday's work session, Commissioners Ed Smith and Sam Johnson were complaining the fees are excessive and stifle new business.

Commissioner Bob English, the only person in the room who has actually built a business and paid impact fees, dismissed the complaints, saying it's a one-time expense and other expenses of starting and operating a business are much more critical to whether a business will survive.

Commissioner Jean Reed pointed out that if new development doesn't pay impact fees the result will that the expense of making the improvements falls on others or local government just simply lets facilities deteriorate.

Watch for more of this kind of discussion next month when commissioners are tentatively scheduled to debate school impact fees. A consultant recently said a much higher fee is justified, but some commissioners and their allies in the development industry are already complaining about the impact fee report's findings.

Commissioners were told to formulate their questions on the school impact fee study so that consultant Randy Young will have an opportunity to respond to them.