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## Impact fee waiver saves Oak Hill \$320,291

By MICHAEL D. BATES

Oak Hill Hospital is the first big recipient of the county's decision to waive impact fees for a year.

Building department statistics show the hospital will save about \$320,291 from the board's decision. The hospital had already budgeted the money and was poised to pay it upon issuance of the building permit, said Christopher Linsbeck, zoning supervisor-administrative officials with development services.

Records show Oak Hill applied on Aug. 5 for a permit for its 85,000-square-foot surgical wing.

"It's going to be a huge savings for them," Linsbeck said.

Oak Hill Hospital CEO Mickey Smith agreed the impact fee suspension represents a large savings. However, more than likely the company will reinvest that money to draw down the cost of the overall \$50 million project or purchase equipment for the new facility.

"It's not like we're totally avoiding paying the impact fee," Smith said. "Instead of a one-time fee, it will go into something that we will pay every year in our property taxes."

It also means Oak Hill patients will not have to absorb the cost of the \$321,000 and that is a savings for the community, he said.

Hoping to jumpstart economic development, county commissioners last week suspended impact fees across the board for commercial and residential construction for a trial one year.

An impact fee is a one-time charge on new development to help pay for county roads, parks and other infrastructure.

County Commissioner Wayne Dukes said the Oak Hill situation will likely cause some people to question the board's suspension of fees.

However, he stands by that decision because, in the long term, he believes it will make people buy homes, convince business owners to go ahead with their expansion projects and put people to work.

Dukes said he had not heard about the Oak Hill savings but is confident the county will realize substantial revenue from the property taxes the expansion will generate for Hernando County.

"There may be some huge savings for some," Dukes said. "But we're looking across the board at everyone."

The impact fee suspension will not take effect until the Florida Secretary of State's Office receives necessary paperwork.

When completed in late 2013, the hospital will have eight additional operating rooms on the first floor and an additional 36 beds in the new cardiovascular wing on the second floor.

Smith said this \$50 million project is the largest healthcare expansion in the history of Hernando County.

The project is expected to employ 500 to 600 construction workers.

Smith said the hospital would have probably already been issued the permit and paid the impact fee if not for an obstacle that came up that delayed pulling the permit — the presence of 22 gopher tortoises on the construction site.

Smith said it will cost some \$2,000 per tortoise to hire a professional handler to remove the threatened reptiles from the property before construction can go forward.

"I've been complaining about them," Smith said. "Maybe I should thank them."

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