

# Leaders hope slashing impact fee will help Pasco business

Posted: 02/22/2011

- By: Erik Waxler

PASCO COUNTY, Fla. - Cyndi Castle is proud to be one of the few women around who can install an air conditioning system.

"I'm one of the guys now. Plus I carry this six inch blade with me, so it tends to help," said Castle who works for Progressive Air Systems.

When the construction business was booming a few years back, Cyndi and her crew worked all the time. But now Pasco County's new housing industry is hurting and she says she can barely pay her bills.

"It's come to a stop and now I know why. I never understood it up until now. I never understood it until now. I just thought people liked Tampa better," said Castle.

The reason, according to many Pasco County business leaders is high impact fees. That's the money builders pay to the county for things like roads, parks, libraries and schools. That can add about \$16,000 to the price of a new home.

Dozens of people connected to the construction industry packed Tuesday's county commission meeting. They hoped to convince board members those fees need to be lowered so they can compete with neighboring counties.

"These people are hear to tell you that. Even the ones that are employed in this room. They are employed at less money and less hours than before. You need to do something and you need to do something today," said Deeb Construction owner, Alex Deeb.

Commissioners agreed something must be done. And while details need to worked out, they agreed to lower the impact fees by about \$10,000.

"It's a big concession from where we were a few minutes ago," said commissioner Ann Hildebrand.

After leaving the meeting, Cyndi says she's more optimistic. She's done this work all her life and would have hard time switching careers.

"I went in and even applied as a waitress and they are looking at my application and saying you've been in this industry for 21 years, as soon as it picks back up you are going to leave, so I didn't get hired," said Castle.

The lower impact fees would be in place through at least the end of 2012. People here just hope that's long enough to get business booming again.

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