

More than 250 Indian River property owners could share \$1.4 million in fee refunds

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INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — More than 250 county property owners stand to get shares of a \$1.4 million refund of fees the county hasn't spent on new parks or fire stations since 2006, county Community Development Director Bob Keating said Tuesday.

Under a new ordinance passed by the County Commission, Keating's staff soon will mail notices informing the people they have 180 days to apply for the refunds.

"We're doing a lot of refunds now," Keating said.

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.

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 until Tuesday, the ordinances didn't require the county to notify property owners when their six years were up so they could apply for a refund.

In a 4-1 vote, commissioners agreed to send the notices instead of expecting people to remember when they paid their impact fees and monitor whether the county was undertaking any capital projects in the following six years.

The measure also allows commissioners to extend the time for spending impact fees from six to nine years if state or federal regulators delay approving certain projects.

Commissioners rejected a proposal from County Attorney Alan Polackwich that would have allowed the county to apply the three-year extensions retroactively to fees collected back in 2007 or thereabouts and otherwise due soon for refund.

Tuesday's action was similar to, but separate from, a Feb. 21 vote to refund \$1.1 million in unspent traffic-impact fees and interest that was collected between 1986 and 1999, and left in an account, from a specific impact-fee district on the barrier island, from Beachland Boulevard south to the St. Lucie County line,

"I'm very happy on behalf of the citizens of Indian River County," said Charlie Wilson. "From what I see, this ends the saga."

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.**ABOUT THE FEES**

Indian River County Budget Director Jason Brown said the county has \$1.4 million in parks-recreation impact fees and \$30,000 in fire-medical impact fees that were collected in 2006 and became eligible for refund on Jan. 1.

Brown said other fees collected six years ago, such as for roads or landfill space, have been spent already.



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