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Orange County Commissioner Wants To Cut Impact Fees



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ORANGE COUNTY, Fla. -- An Orange County commissioner with major ties to the construction industry is now pushing a plan that would help developers. He wants to cut construction impact fees.

Commissioners started talking about the issue late Tuesday afternoon. They just decided to move forward with drafting an ordinance that would reduce impact fees by 25 percent.

Developers want a moratorium. The ordinance is being pushed by a commissioner whose law firm represents some heavy hitters in the real estate industry.

Orange County Commissioner Ted Edwards is an attorney at a prominent real estate firm in Orange County. He owns interests in development deals and, before he was seated, he lobbied on behalf of builders, including Harris Rosen.

Now, Edwards is pushing an ordinance that would give developers a break on impact fees that fund infrastructure for roads, parks, law enforcement and fire. Two commissioners told WFTV they question his motivation.

"One of these things I ran on was trying to stimulate jobs, stimulate the economy, and doing it by deferring impact fees," Edwards said.

Mayor Teresa Jacobs said she's not sure an impact fee reduction alone would get people back to work. About 20 municipalities statewide have reduced or placed a moratorium on the fees.

But Orange County staff warned commissioners that even a 20 percent reduction would cost the county \$5 million. Several dozen builders told commissioners they need the help, but 20 percent won't cut it.

Let's say you want to build a 20,000 square-foot office building. The impact fee will be \$150,000, and 20 percent of that is \$30,000. Those in the construction industry say that's just pennies on the dollar, especially if it's a multi-million-dollar project.

"To truly stimulate the economy we should have a moratorium on impact fees," said Marion McGrath of the Builder's Association.

Commissioner Edwards said currently none of his personal real estate deals are before the board, and if they come up he promised to recuse himself.

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