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Panel backs county impact fee in Port St. Lucie

By [Jim Reeder](#)
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FORT PIERCE — The St. Lucie County Planning and Zoning Commission on Thursday endorsed a new way of collecting impact fees in Port St. Lucie that involves putting liens on new buildings.

But the board urged the city and county to keep negotiating the impact-fee issue in hopes that the county won't have to resort to such action.

They also recommended the county commission increase school impact fees from $3,192 to $4,956 for a single-family house.

Port St. Lucie property owners could be faced with paying new city impact fees to pay for roads, parks and public buildings in addition to the county's fees, which have been in effect for years.

"I know developers don't want to pay extra fees in Port St. Lucie, but we don't have a choice," County Administrator Doug Anderson said. "The money is committed and our debt service has to be paid."

Port St. Lucie officials have vowed to quit collecting county impact fees when they issue building permits and could collect their own fees totaling $2,712 instead of getting a percentage of the county's fees totaling $2,852.

The county proposes to notify new-building owners they owe the county fees, then put a lien on the property if owners don't pay. The county could go to court to collect the lien.

Anderson said he hopes the new method won't be necessary but asked the planning board to recommend approval so the county can be ready if further talks with Port St. Lucie are unsuccessful.

"We'll have one last meeting with Port St. Lucie Aug. 26," Anderson said. "This ordinance is a fallback position in case we can't work things out."

Don Santos, speaking for the Treasure Coast Builders Association, said he fears the new collection method will "shut down construction in Port St. Lucie."

He said a buyer whose house is under construction may not have cash available when he receives the county's impact-fee notice.

"It won't be in the construction loan," Santos said. "This may affect their ability to buy a house."

Planning board members said mortgage lenders and builders should notify people at the start that they'll have to pay the county fee.

Attorney Bobby Klein, who represents several developers in the city, said he sees several problems with the proposal and "the truth hasn't come out."

"I'm struck by the fact if you're in Port St. Lucie you pay double," Klein said. "Tax rates need to be raised so everybody pays their share."

Dave Skiles, president of the St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce, urged the city and county try to settle their dispute through arbitration or further negotiations.

He and chamber member Jim McKenzie said they will try to arrange discussions to get the city and county to settle their differences.

Schools Superintendent Michael Lannon said higher school impact fees are needed as one part of a plan to raise $2 billion over the next 20 years to build new schools.

Santos said builders recognize that good schools are important for an educated workforce.

"I think it's a fair fee, but we would like to see it a little lower," Santos said. "Workforce housing is a major, major problem, and we need to cut costs where possible."

County commissioners planned to consider the higher fees and new method of collection in the next few weeks.