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Park, fire impact fees to go up

Osceola's charge on new homes could raise \$4.7 million

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KISSIMMEE -- Osceola County commissioners on Monday approved two fees on new construction that could raise \$4 million annually for parks and another \$700,000 for fire stations.

The parks fee could run as much as \$924 for each single-family home built in unincorporated parts of the county. Developers also will pay \$159 per single-family home for fire and emergency services. Nonresidential developers will pay only the fire-EMS fee.

The new fees will go into effect for building permits pulled after Oct. 1.

Florida cities and counties are increasingly using one-time charges on development, known as impact fees, to offset the cost of providing services to new residents. Osceola officials often say the fees help ensure that "growth pays for itself."

Developers usually pass some or all of the fees on to home buyers in the form of a higher purchase price. Osceola already has impact fees to help pay for schools and roads. The county has proposed increasing the road fee from \$4,500 to about \$10,000.

No residents weighed in on the fees at Monday's meeting, but 59 percent of voters surveyed recently said impact fees hurt first-time home buyers. Only 41 percent of the voters agreed the county should impose an impact fee for parks, while 46 percent supported the fire-EMS impact fee, in a poll of 600 voters conducted for the Kissimmee-Osceola Chamber of Commerce.

Local home builders have said they don't have a problem with the fees as long as they are used to pay for new growth and not infrastructure problems caused by past development.

The fire-EMS fee is higher than in Orange County but less than what Volusia, Lake and Seminole counties charge. The park and recreation fee is more than what Volusia, Polk and Lake charge, but less than in Orange County, consultant Randy Young said.

The fire-EMS fee would be charged on all new construction within unincorporated Osceola -- including government buildings, schools and churches -- to help pay for new fire stations, trucks, ambulances and on-board medical equipment such as defibrillators. Impact fees cannot be used to pay for recurring operating costs, such as salaries and benefits.

Nonresidential developers would pay fees ranging from 5 cents per square foot for industrial or manufacturing businesses to \$2.60 per square foot for group-living facilities.

The fees for parks and recreation would be charged on new single-family homes, apartments and mobile homes across the county to buy land, boat ramps, ball fields, lights and other recreational amenities to serve the growing population.

The charge in the unincorporated area would run between about \$677 and \$924 per home, while builders in Kissimmee and St. Cloud would pay between \$397 and \$550 per home.

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