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Editorial: Cape Impact Fees

Parks worth expense

A proposed 400 percent park fee increase highlights the dramatic affect growth has had on Cape Coral.

Originally posted on January 21, 2006

A proposed increase in Cape Coral's park impact fee is generating the usual stir. Impact fees on new homes could soon total almost \$17,000.

These one-time fees on new construction, while not entirely fair, are actually a good mechanism for raising money that local government urgently needs to meet demand for new public infrastructure.

Growth in the Cape generated the proposed 400 percent increase in the \$1,115 park and recreation impact fee. The money is needed to help cover the cost of land and improvements.

The cost of land for parks has risen drastically. City parks and recreation director Steve Pohlman says the \$6,000 to \$10,000 per lot it cost to buy such land in 2002 and 2003 has jumped to \$90,000 per lot. The \$70 million envisioned as adequate for parks acquisition in the current master plan is cruelly outdated.

Similar inflation is crippling land-buying programs for schools, roads, conservation all across Southwest Florida. Even if the housing-land bubble bursts, the drop is unlikely to be large enough to dispense with the new impact fees being charged around the region.

Besides, no local government can afford to wait and hope for land prices to go down because population growth and demand for services continues unabated.

Cape Coral north of Pine Island Road, nearly deserted not too many years ago, is filling up rapidly, but it hasn't even a single playground.

IMPACT FEES

- Cape Coral: Park fee, \$1,115; total fees, \$12,747.33 (Proposed park fee, \$5,152; total fees, \$16,784.33)
 - Lee County: Park fees, \$1,479; total fees, \$11,664
 - Bonita Springs: Park fees, \$1,171; total fees, \$15,809.50
 - Sanibel: Park fees, \$1,479; total fees, \$9,333.94
- Note: Fort Myers and Fort Myers Beach figures were not available.

IF YOU GO

- What: Cape Coral Committee of the Whole meeting; agenda includes presentation of a study on increasing park impact fees
- When: 3 p.m. Monday
- Where: City Hall, 1015 Cultural Park Blvd., Cape Coral

CONTACT THEM

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Impact fees are not a flawless revenue device. They are assessed only against new homes. People who buy existing homes or rent have more impact on schools, possibly on parks, certainly as much on roads as the buyers of new homes, many of whom are retirees.

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The fairness issue is not an overwhelming one. Even the median cost of an existing home in Lee County is about \$300,000, so new homes are not an option for people who need affordable housing anyway. It is not impact fees that are making houses hard to afford in Lee County.

Still, a \$4,000 increase in the park fee is huge. Let Cape officials know how you feel about it.

<< [Back](#)