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# Pasco agrees to cut impact fees

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Peter Linton-Smith  
FOX 13 News Pasco County reporter

NEW PORT RICHEY - A long line formed outside the Pasco County Administration Building more than two hours before the doors opened for Tuesday's commission meeting.

"We are tired of these crushing taxes these crushing impact fees," Jim Deitch told the crowd.

Deitch runs Southern Crafted Homes. He helped organize people to attend Tuesday's meeting to protest Pasco County's impact fees.

Developers pay impact fees to connect their newly built homes to roads and sewers. The average impact fee is at least \$17,000.

"These extra impact fees that they're putting on people is really going slow down the building and it's cost a lot of people jobs," explained Paul Mattingly, who works at Highwoods Contractors.

Twenty-one Florida counties have cut or suspended their impact fees in an effort to jump-start the depressed home building business. Pasco County has resisted attempts to cut impact fees.

"Right now, we are losing business to Hillsborough County, Pinellas, Sarasota County, Polk County," Deitch told commissioners.

In addition to building roads, sewers, sidewalks and other infrastructure, impact fees also help underwrite the construction of new schools.

"This year we had to cut \$28-million from our budget," said Pasco schools superintendent Heather Fiorentino. "Next year we are facing a minimum of \$60-million being cut in our operating funds."

Fiorentino said the loss of up to 50 percent of impact fee revenues could be devastating to the school system.

Commissioner Ted Schrader warned cutting the fees would do little to reverse the slide in property values or help ease the foreclosure crisis.

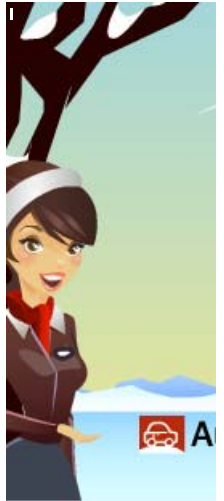
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Commissioner Henry Wilson explained he would support cutting impact fees under one condition: "My request is to you, if we are reducing these fees, is that you reduce the fees that are to the people who are buying the houses."

In the end, commissioners agreed to cut impact fees by up to half. They will finalize the new fee schedule within a month.

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