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Pender may allow temporary reprieve on water system impact fee

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Pender County residents considering connecting to the county's water system may get temporary relief from the impact fee.

The county commissioners are weighing the idea of placing a moratorium on the fee during July for county residents who would like to hook up to the county water system, said board Chairman David Williams. The board will vote on the moratorium July 7.

The board is considering the reprieve because residents complained to county employees and the commissioners about not knowing about the impact fee that went into effect in April.

The board advertised the impact fee at its April 21 agenda and voted during that meeting to allow the utilities department to begin assessing the impact fee to individual homeowners. In addition to the \$850 tap fee, residents will now have to pay an impact fee, which costs \$1,440 for a 3-bedroom home, said Michael Mack, county utilities director. Previously, the \$4-a-gallon impact fee, which helps pay some of the additional cost brought on by new customers to the system, was only charged to developers.

The money from the impact fee will be used to fund some of the utilities department capital projects such as the county's 2 million-gallon-a-day wastewater treatment plant, Mack said.

"Instead of having to borrow all the money, the county would have money it could put toward the project," he said.

Residents such as Eileen Curinga of Hampstead said that Pender County residents couldn't afford to pay the impact fee.

"What are people going to do when their wells run dry and they can't afford to pay

this fee?," Curinga said. "People need water."

Williams said the board is considering the proposed 25-day moratorium to help people who didn't know about the new charges or can't afford to pay the impact fee. The board is even considering a refund for the eight people who've already paid the fee.

"As far as a business decision goes it's not a wise one, but in a representative government you've got to consider the human factor more than a business would," Williams said. "We advertised for the meeting like we were supposed to do, but in hindsight maybe we could have gotten the word out better."

If passed, the moratorium would last from the afternoon of July 7 through Aug. 1, Williams said.

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