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Phooey On Schools, And Pass The Menu

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Why anyone would bother standing up in front of this body of boobs is beyond me.

Unless you enjoy beating your head against the wall because it feels so good when you stop, I can't understand why anyone would willingly face this crowd.

Last week, it was the schools' turn to get pilloried by your Hillsborough County Commission.

There was a sizable crowd of school administrators, parents and teachers on hand at Wednesday's regular meeting, to plead for some help from the commissioners.

The topic was impact fees, or more to the point, raising the county's low fees to help pay for more schools.

Hillsborough County schools are in a crisis of numbers, which is hardly news anymore, except that the number of students coming in and the amount of debt piling up are reaching staggering levels.

Unfortunately it is not, as one speaker said, a "no-brainer" issue.

That speaker was Denise Layne, a longtime activist, sometime candidate and advocate for controlled growth. These days she spends a great deal of time lobbying in Tallahassee and she knows the system.

No-Brainer?

She was wrong on the no-brainer line only because the school district has a pretty shaky track record on how it spends its money.

It is not just commissioners who look at a top-heavy school administration and see

crowded schools with no copy machines and teachers drowning in red tape.

But everything else Layne said was on target. "If the local governments do not do their part with impact fees, they're going to be on the short list of state funding," she said.

That was important because the only argument several of the commissioners could make against raising the impact fees is that schools are being promised a billion-dollar gravy train from the Jeb Bush people to fund school construction.

The downside to that one is that it is unlikely the Legislature will cough up anywhere near that amount of money.

It is even less likely that school administrators will get any positive support from the county commissioners, most of whom seem to care more about their political hides than public schools.

On Wednesday, the commissioners appeared less interested in hearing the facts from schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia than in pontificating about how they are all parents, belong to the PTA and support public education.

Some Other Time

They followed up by voting to do nothing about impact fees. Voting against any immediate impact fee increases in the 4-3 vote were Chairman Jim Norman, Tom Scott, Brian Blair and Ronda Storms.

Then, County Administrator Pat Bean asked whether they might please do one thing and talk about a Family Justice Center initiative, only because that agency's director had been sitting in the chamber all morning.

Norman, obviously late for a lunch date, told Bean that was against a board policy, that she should have known better, and he was adjourning the meeting.

Unbelievable.

This story can be found at: <http://www.tampatrib.com/MGB7A8ROUJE.html>

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