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Polk Commission May Extend Impact Fee Moratorium

By [Tom Palmer](#)

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BARTOW | Polk County commissioners will consider extending the impact fee moratorium when they meet Wednesday.

Commissioners voted 3-2 in July to impose a six-month moratorium on all impact fees except for those for schools.

The commissioners also agreed to review the decision in three months to determine whether to extend it or to provide notice to developers that the moratorium would end in three months.

Under the county's impact fee ordinance, greater notice is required to increase impact fees than to decrease them.

Any change commissioners approve would have involved a revision of the county's impact fee ordinance at a public hearing.

Commissioners will decide Wednesday when to hold the public hearing. County staffs are recommending a Dec. 1 hearing.

In addition, commissioners would have to decide whether to extend provisions that require developers taking advantage of the moratorium to begin and complete construction within a specified time.

The impact fee moratorium was intended to encourage commercial development, which pays substantial impact fees because the impact on the county road system is greater than residential development, which pays lower impact fees.

Interim County Manager Jim Freeman told commissioners at Friday's agenda study session there has been an increase in pre-applications in August and September, but only a handful of cases involved new projects that have gotten to the point where they are close to final approval and poised to obtain a building permit.

Only two of the five commissioners — Bob English, who voted for the moratorium, and Jean Reed, who voted against it — were at Friday's meeting, so there was no consensus.

English asked Freeman if he could draw any conclusions from the data on development activity since the moratorium took effect Aug. 1.

According to figures compiled by the county's Growth Management Department, pre-applications increased, but there was a decrease in actual reviews leading to building permits for non-residential development in the latest quarter.

Freeman said it's hard to say what the numbers mean because it involves such a small sample.

"Pre-applications are an indication of interest, not what will happen," he said.

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Seven of the 13 pre-applications in August involved requests to change the county growth plan, not to propose any specific development.

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County Attorney Michael Craig told commissioners that six months does not provide prospective developers who do not already own the property they plan to develop enough time to work out the details so that they're ready to get a building permit to take advantage of the moratorium.

The original proposal before commissioners was for a one-year moratorium.

One year is enough time, Craig said.

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