

County Commission Decision Coming On Extending Impact Fee Moratorium

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BARTOW | Polk County commissioners agreed Friday to hold a public hearing May 15 to decide whether to extend the impact fee moratorium.

Commissioners imposed a moratorium on transportation, parks, jail, police, ambulance service and libraries that went into effect Aug. 1, 2010. They later voted to extend it to July 31, 2012. Impact fees for school facilities were unaffected.

Impact fees are fees charged on new development to pay for the costs of providing facilities and services to handle the impacts of that growth.

Without impact fees, the entire cost of improving public facilities and services falls on the general taxpayers.

In 2005, the infrastructure needs of Polk County got so far behind that the County Commission imposed the largest tax increase in memory to fix the deficit.

The idea behind the moratorium, which was pushed by the development community, was to encourage economic development, though the effect of impact fees as a barrier to development has been a subject of debate.

County Manager Jim Freeman said unless commissioners vote to extend the moratorium, it will expire automatically, but impact fees will not resume until commissioners hire a consultant for an updated study on what to charge.

Freeman said it would take six months to hire a consultant and review the findings.

Commissioners seemed inclined to support continuing the moratorium.

"I don't see the economy changing in six months," Commission Chairman Sam Johnson said.

He said continuing the moratorium to a certain date would give developers an idea of what to expect.

Commissioner Bob English asked whether there was interest in studying mobility fees, which are an alternative to transportation impact fees that base the charge on the amount of road improvements a development would require, based on its location.

Freeman said commissioners could ask for that, too.

English also questioned why school impact fees were left out of the moratorium if the mood of the commission was anti-impact fee.

"I thought they needed the money," Commissioner Todd Dantzler said.

Commissioner Melony Bell said she'd like to put that on the agenda for the upcoming joint meeting of the County Commission and the School Board, which is yet to be scheduled.

Bell also asked for a listing of building permit activity since the moratorium was enacted.

She said she was interested in looking at the amount of revenue the fees would have generated if the moratorium had not been in place.

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