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Polk May Lower School Impact Fee

By **BILLY TOWNSEND** The Tampa Tribune

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BARTOW - With more state money in hand for class-size reduction, Polk County is poised to lop off more than 30 percent of its \$8,596 new home impact fee for school construction.

The Polk County Commission will vote today on a proposal to reduce the fee, one of the highest in the state, to \$6,006 for a single-family home. That's a \$2,590 discount on the current fee.

By comparison, Hillsborough County imposes a \$196 fee on each new single-family home to help pay for school construction. Hillsborough commissioners are debating a plan that gradually would raise the fee to \$3,880 by May 2008.

The fees are designed to force developers and people moving into new homes to help pay for expanding school systems. New class-size reduction rules approved by Florida voters in 2002 have further driven demand for new classrooms and schools.

Polk's proposed decrease essentially is a credit made possible by state funding for class-size reduction requirements. In 2005, the county adopted a rule requiring the school district to add up how much class-size money it receives from the state each year and report to the county. Based on that amount, the commission is supposed to adjust the impact fee.

In a letter sent in late June, the Polk school district reported that it received \$81.6 million for 2006 from the state's Classrooms for Kids class-size reduction spending program. That translates into the proposed \$2,590 decrease in the fee, according to the county's impact fee consultant.

Polk's school impact fee has been controversial. The Polk County Builders Association challenged it in circuit court this year, saying only \$2,838 is justified. The lawsuit is pending.

Even with the decrease, the school impact fee would remain the costliest of Polk's 10 impact fees, which help fund other basic services.

If the school fee decrease goes through, Polk's impact fee for a new single-family home would total \$17,846.

Reporter Billy Townsend can be reached at (863) 284-1409 or wtownsend@tampatrib.com.

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