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From Orlando Sentinel

Polk adds fee for parks, increases charge for EMS

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BARTOW -- The Polk County Commission voted Wednesday to implement an impact fee for parks and recreation and raised the existing emergency medical services impact fee.

Beginning Oct. 1, single-family homes built in Polk will have a parks and recreation impact fee of \$444, which was approved 4-1.

Commissioner Randy Wilkinson voted against the parks and recreation impact fee, but he did approve an increase in the EMS impact fee, which passed unanimously.

Polk's existing EMS impact fee of \$49 for a single-family home will increase to \$97 beginning Oct. 1.

Wednesday's votes will give Polk a total of \$5,005 in impact fees -- far less than neighboring Osceola County, where impact fees can reach \$15,555.

Polk County government is short \$581 million needed to pay for big-ticket projects such as road construction, new parks and libraries.

For months, officials have discussed alternatives to funding the \$581 million shortfall -- what they have deemed an "infrastructure gap" caused by years of little to no impact fees and revenue sources.

Increasing and implementing new impact fees is the first option to make it before the five-member commission on funding growth.

Impact fees for single-family homes in Polk County exist for jails, schools, emergency medical services and transportation.

No funding source is designated for facilities, stormwater drainage, libraries, information technology or law enforcement.

Another alternative to funding the infrastructure gap is implementing a Municipal Services Tax Unit in unincorporated Polk, which has been championed by Commissioner Bob English.

Commissioners voted Wednesday to have a public hearing June 1 to discuss implementing municipal-services units.

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