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Polk Building Permits Cool From Year-Ago Rate

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LAKELAND -- Polk County's builders took a break from permit requests in October.

Builders pulled only 783 permits for new home construction last month. That is a 44 percent decrease from October 2004's total of 1,404.

Building officials witnessed a steady increase in the number of permits issued in almost every city in recent months, and they attributed that rise to the new impact fee deadline of Dec. 1.

Polk County commissioners in September approved raising school impact fees by 435 percent. The impact fee will rise from \$1,607 to \$8,596 for a new, single-family house.

"A lot of developers are waiting on surveyors and engineering plans to get done," said Tim Wallace, Lake Alfred's building and zoning director. "Everyone is so busy."

Unincorporated Polk County's issued permits fell from 1,067 in 2004 to 435 this year, a 59 percent decrease.

Auburndale's permits jumped from 16 in October 2004 to 29 last month.

"We are getting ready to plat even more subdivisions Monday night," said Amy Palmer, Auburndale's Community Development director.

In the next few months, the city will be expecting permits to be pulled for several subdivisions, including Bentley Oaks, with 112 lots; Whispering Pines in December, with 144 lots; and the Estates of Auburndale Phase II, with 203 lots.

"We will be issuing a lot more permits than we have in the past," she said. "That trend will continue. There are several more subdivisions that are coming up and in the planning stages."

For the same month last year, Haines City posted 151 permits. But this year, builders pulled only 59 permits.

"Things have been pretty much the same," Richard Greenwood, Haines City's community redevelopment director, said of the recent growth. "We have several industrial projects coming in and a number of commercial developments."

And where commercial growth thrives, residential growth will follow, he said. "It is pretty much

across the board."

Builders across the nation started 2,010,000 homes in October. This is a 2.4 percent decrease from last year's total of 2,060,000. Since September, construction starts on new homes and apartments decreased 5.6 percent nationwide.

The Ledger reports building permit totals because Polk County does not track housing starts.

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