

[Back](#)

Published Saturday, February 26, 2005

County to Progress on Road Fee Idea

By [Tom Palmer](#)

The Ledger

BARTOW -- County commissioners will take another step next week toward deciding how to assess road impact fees for new development.

Wednesday, commissioners are scheduled to approve a recommendation from the Impact Fee Advisory Committee about a new study on how much Polk County should charge for road impact fees.

The committee's recommendation, discussed at Friday's agenda study session, is meant to eliminate controversy about how impact fees for new developments are calculated.

The current road impact fee assessed on a new home is \$2,707. That fee is 65 percent of the \$4,292 a consultant recommended. Before that increase last year, the fee was \$967.

Local governments impose impact fees on new development to help defray the cost of public facilities and services needed to serve the incoming residents.

The new road impact fee study was followed by developers' criticisms of the way the county's consultant had calculated the fees, based on numbers of vehicle trips.

Commissioners agreed to a new study and appointed an 11 member Impact Fee Advisory Committee in the fall to offer advice on how to proceed.

The committee also is examining impact fee proposals for parks, ambulance service, jails and libraries.

County Manager Mike Herr and Tom Deardorff, the county's director of long-range planning, said the methodology would be based on national standards for measuring trips, adjusted for local conditions. The goal is to avoid double-counting trips, allowing the study to calculate accurate impacts for each type of development.

Accurate counting of vehicle trips was the basis for last year's criticisms.

If commissioners approve the methodology Wednesday, the county will advertise for consultants to conduct a new study, Herr said. A selection committee is to make a recommendation to the County Commission by April 19.

The selection committee is made up of Deardorff, a county commissioner and Impact Fee Advisory

Committee members Robert Dodd, Pam Page, Woody Rayburn and Bob Williams.

Commissioners expect to approve a contract by May 4 if they approve the committee's recommendation, Herr said.

Herr said he did not know how long the study would take.

Meanwhile, the Impact Fee Advisory Committee will make final recommendations March 17 on what kinds of parks and ambulance impact fees the county should charge, said Assistant County Manager Lea Ann Thomas.

Polk County doesn't assess an impact fee for parks. Its \$49 ambulance fee has not been reviewed in years.

If commissioners accept the committee's recommendation, they will schedule a public hearing to consider formal adoption of the new fees.

Thomas said the committee has commissioned a study on the jail impact fee and should have information in two months.

The county assesses a \$152 jail impact fee on new homes, but not businesses. The study will update the fee. That could mean higher fees and could for the first time apply the fee to new commercial development.

Thomas said commissioners also asked the committee to study a first-ever library impact fee.

A year ago, the idea of adding fire impact fees was brought up, but commissioners never directed Herr to pursue it.

Property owners in unincorporated areas of Polk County pay an annual fire tax, authorized by a 1974 referendum. The tax is regularly increased to keep pace with inflation.
