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Port St. Lucie will no longer collect some county fees

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PORT ST. LUCIE — Port St. Lucie's Building Department will quit collecting county development fees for roads, public buildings and parks Sept. 30, but city council members said they might collect some fees if county officials make a "compelling case" new buildings are needed and will benefit Port St. Lucie residents.

The council's 5-0 vote Monday to cancel the impact fee agreements was expected after years of city complaints the county didn't spend enough of the money in the city where it was collected.

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"We'll take care of our own people," Mayor Bob Minsky said Monday. "If the county makes a compelling case and breaks our hearts, then I'll consider a fee to help them."

"They're not building roads, but I do feel an obligation to help with public buildings and the jail," Councilman Jack Kelly said.

Vice Mayor Pat Christensen said, "I've seen little coming back to Port St. Lucie.

"We've seen the opposite with us taking over roads and parks they couldn't maintain to the city's standard," she said.

St. Lucie County Administrator Doug Anderson said the city council's action is discouraging.

"We have a long-range plan for parks, buildings and roads," he said. "Now we have to find other ways to finance them."

He said the city is affecting public safety by backing out of the public buildings impact fee, which helps pay for jail and courthouse expansion.

But city council members said they're willing to collect a county public buildings fee in proportion to the projects' benefit to city residents.

"The ball's in the county's court to make a compelling case," Councilwoman Michelle Berger said.

Effective Oct. 1, the county's $2,100 road impact fee on single-family houses will be replaced by the city's $1,894 fee. The county's $354 public buildings fee will be replaced by the city's $360 fee per single-family house.

The parks and recreation fee will drop from $465 to $458.

Attorney Tom Wright, a consultant on the impact fee study, said the city's fees could be even higher.

"You could raise your public buildings fee from $360 to $602 without further study," he said.

He said that's the amount needed to pay for the city's proposed buildings, but officials chose to go with a lower figure.

Port St. Lucie will continue to collect county impact fees for libraries, schools, law enforcement and fire-rescue.

Impact fees are collected when a building permit is issued, on the theory that new residents or businesses should pay for the new roads, buildings and other improvements needed to serve them.

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