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Article published Dec 7, 2005

ROAD IMPACT FEES

Proposal doubles charges Higher fees will not take effect until Feb.

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THE STAR-BANNER

OCALA - Those building a new home in Marion County would pay more than twice the current amount in road impact fees, according to a proposal presented to county commissioners Tuesday.

The upfront charge on a single-family home would go from \$2,212 to \$5,143, based upon a study done by Tampa engineering firm, Tindale-Oliver & Associates. Impact fees are one-time charges used to offset the cost of road improvements needed because of development.

Fees for multi-family homes would go from \$1,415 to \$2,869, and charges for mobile homes would jump from \$1,099 to \$2,247. New homes in retirement communities would increase from \$1,109 to \$1,769.

Retail development, ranging from 100,000 to 150,000 square feet, would pay \$6,263 per 1,000 square feet, up from the current rate of \$3,586 per square foot. Restaurants with drive-throughs would take one of the biggest hits, with rates rising from \$16,671 to \$63,955 per 1,000 square feet. Rates for banks with drive-throughs would also more than double.

Commissioners, however, appeared concerned over many of the fees, questioning the methodology used to arrive at the figures. The board is planning to address the fees during a workshop next year, which means the new rates would not be in place by Jan. 1, as commissioners had hoped.

The county hired Tindale-Oliver to update the fees, which have not been revised since 2002. Bob Wallace, vice-president of the company, said due to higher right of way prices and other factors, the county's cost of road construction per mile during the past four years had increased 73 percent, from \$1.7 million to \$2.9 million.

Wallace said the reason that rates for drive-through establishments had jumped up so much was that the county's previous estimates for car traffic generated by the businesses was low.

"They're consuming more of your road capacity," he said.

Commissioners were clearly uneasy over the drive-through fees, saying they would discourage businesses from opening in the county.

"Say a restaurant is 5,000 square feet. They're going to pay \$300,000?" asked Commissioner Andy Kesselring. "Are we potentially cutting off some of the retail activity in places we want it to happen? Potentially, we're just increasing the length of our (car) trips."

Added Commissioner Charlie Stone: "What about our mom and pop restaurants? They can't afford these kind of expenses."

Wallace recommended the county provide some sort of financial aid, such as a grant program, for the businesses but warned against lowering fees for certain types of establishments, saying it would invite lawsuits.

A representative from the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association could not be reached about the impact fees late Tuesday.

Commissioners also asked whether there were different methods for determining the fees or whether the fees could vary according to geographic areas.

If the fees more than double, it would represent a significant increase for new homeowners, who are already paying record high prices in Marion County. The School Board is also considering charging an education impact fee.

"Most people can't afford a home here now, and you're going to increase that," resident Rodney Booth told commissioners. He said the impact fees would artificially inflate the area's home values.

Commissioners hoped to implement the higher fees by Jan. 1, but they will not take effect until February or even March, Commission Chairman Jim Payton said after Tuesday's meeting.

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