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Article published Apr 20, 2006

Fee hike

Proposed fee increases would boost the cost of building a home in Punta Gorda by \$11,000.

Punta Gorda's fees may triple

The city could join the trend that sees the cost of building homes rising to help pay for growth.

By SARA LUBBES

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PUNTA GORDA -- Building a home here in Charlotte County's already-pricey city could cost at least an extra \$11,000 by the end of the year.

In response to Southwest Florida's building boom, the city is considering nearly tripling the impact fees charged to build new homes.

Those fees, which help pay for growth, would come on top on charges already levied by Charlotte County.

The county recently boosted its charges on new homes by an average of \$5,000.

On top of that, Punta Gorda is about to raise water and sewer impact fees.

And Charlotte's school system is investigating whether to add an impact fee for schools for the first time.

Add it all up, and the cost of building in paradise is poised for a major hike.

"We do want the people who cause the growth to pay for it," said Assistant City Manager Kathy Dailey. "They're getting the advantage of what's already here."

If the new Punta Gorda charges are approved, a person building a 2,000-square-foot home in the city would pay about \$18,000, including Charlotte's fees.

That's up from about \$7,000 in 2005.

Officials say the hikes are long overdue: The county had not raised impact fees since 1994; Punta Gorda has not changed the fees since creating them 15 years ago.

"They are the lowest fees I've ever encountered," said Dwayne Guthrie, a consultant the city

hired to study impact fees.

Punta Gorda's proposal is designed to bring the city in line with other area governments, which lately have boosted impact fees to ease growing pains.

Manatee County has raised its fees about \$8,000 to a total of \$11,553, and Sarasota County is studying the possibility of a significant increase.

The fees are a onetime charge used to pay for the roads, parks and fire stations new residents demand.

Punta Gorda's impact fee would still be one of the lowest in the area. But the boost would add about \$2.8 million per year into the city's coffers.

The money could only be used to pay for new roads and other public services.

The city anticipates it will add about 7,000 residents in the next 10 years.

"It's not really extra money," Dailey said.

The building industry is wary of impact fee increases because extra costs mean residents might look elsewhere for a home.

Jon Bednerik, executive officer of the Charlotte-DeSoto Building Industry Association, criticized Punta Gorda's consultants for creating a list of what kinds of projects the city might want to build in the next 10 years, instead of working off a list of existing projects.

"It was like a laundry list of Christmas shopping up there," he said.

City Council members had few comments about the impact fee proposal Wednesday.

But they did ask for the numbers to be revised so that condo owners would pay a higher fee than single-family homeowners.

Even if the council approves the fees soon, they wouldn't go into effect until October.

"Let's keep moving forward," Mayor Steve Fabian said.