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Road money gap, impact fees on Jan. 10 agenda

Foreshadowing, setting the stage, strategic timing -- all describe why Charlotte County commissioners have scheduled Jan. 10 public hearings on the county's five-year Capital Improvements Program and impact fees.

One hearing will identify a problem -- a CIP with an estimated \$100 million shortfall -- and the other will explore partial solutions, such as raising some existing impact fees and imposing new levies.

The CIP is a five-year blueprint of infrastructure improvements financed from projected revenues. It is updated annually as part of the county's budget process.

While planning the county's 2005-06 budget, commissioners acknowledged the county's \$142 million five-year CIP was woefully underfunded.

Commissioners filled part of the projected gap between planned projects and anticipated revenues by approving a .6 increase in property tax millage rates, which equates to 60 cents for every \$1,000 of taxable value.

The increase will generate \$35.9 million over the next four years of the \$53.25 million necessary to augment completion of six projects: Charlotte County Jail expansion; a new events center; upgrades to three fire stations; a public safety complex; renovations to the historic courthouse; and a new Health Department building.

However, since the county does not use property tax revenues to finance road projects, millage-rate hikes cannot address the CIP's \$79 million in planned, but "unfunded," road projects.

Since July, commissioners have staged several "revenue-generating workshops" and established an ad hoc committee of planners, developers and land-use attorneys to explore ways to better finance road projects.

Charlotte County's impact fee structure -- stipends paid by builders to cover the infrastructure demands new development fosters -- are substantially lower than those levied in other counties in the region.

The county doesn't assess an impact fee to subsidize new school construction, a levy many see as

long overdue.

"As a county, you guys have to look into adopting school-impact fees," Dan DeLisi, Bonita Bay Group director of planning, told commissioners during a Nov. 15 hearing on the Burnt Store Area Plan.

DeLisi is not only an executive with one of the region's largest developers, but serves on the state's Impact Fee Review Task Force.

And he understands local politics. "The builders are going to shoot me for saying that," he quickly added.

The Charlotte-DeSoto Builders & Contractors Associations opposes across-the-board hikes in impact fees.

The association cites an exhaustive study prepared by the National Association of Home Builders to support its contention that impact fees are not the solution to financing roads and other infrastructure.

But, as Commissioner [Matt DeBoer](#) warned before adopting a 2005-06 budget with a glaring CIP deficit, the opposition could be short-sighted.

"I hope the building industry takes a good look at what they are saying," he said. "You guys keep going ahead the way you're going, you're looking at a moratorium."

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