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Santa Rosa County impact fees

Some examples of the county's new impact fee schedule that goes into effect Jan. 1:

Homes on a lot, including duplexes and mobile homes

Urban: \$2,090

Rural: \$1,222

Multi-family unit

Urban: \$1,468

Rural: \$858

Mobile homes in amobile-home park

Urban: \$1,090

Rural: \$637

Fast-food restaurant

Urban: \$8,684

Rural: \$5,078

Commercial/retail(per 1,000 square feet)

Urban: \$2,833 (under 100,000 square feet)

Rural: \$1,657 (under 100,000 square feet)

Urban: \$3,611 (between 100,000 and 199,999 square feet)

Rural: \$2,112 (between 100,000 and 199,999 square feet)

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Published - December, 9, 2005

Santa Rosa OKs impact fees

Extra cost on new home, retail construction to help fund road projects

Derek Pivnick

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Buying a house in Santa Rosa County is about to become more expensive.

After two years of discussion and work, the County Commission on Thursday unanimously voted to begin assessing impact fees on new construction. The fees, expected to generate \$7.5 million a year, will be used to build and widen roads in one of the fastest-growing counties in the state.

The ordinance is effective Jan. 1, although homes and businesses approved for construction before that date won't be subject to the new tax.

After the law goes into effect, a new single-family home in the central and southern portions of the county will cost an additional \$2,090. The fee will be \$1,222 in the northern part of the county.

The payment can be spread over seven years.

Commissioners called impact fees the first step in a multipronged approach to collect enough revenue to allow them to reduce property taxes. Other measures under consideration include increasing the county's gasoline tax and imposing a one-cent sales tax.

"The impact fee, in my opinion, is a drop in the bucket" compared to the county's needs, Commissioner Tom Stewart said.

Some estimates show the county needs \$270 million in road work over the next 10 years. The county hopes to update that estimate by next spring.

"The bottom line is we have to get our infrastructure caught up," said Commissioner Don Salter. "You have to start somewhere."

The fees' effect on new businesses is substantial. A 10,000-square-foot urban commercial or retail operation would have to pay \$28,332. A 100,000-square-foot operation would pay \$361,100.

Salter said exempting some businesses from impact fees could be part of an incentive package, and that modifications to the ordinance may be needed to allow exceptions.

"I want to make sure we're not killing the goose that laid the golden egg," he said.

The county's new impact fee schedule was adopted after a study and recommendations by a Tallahassee company. The same firm, Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson, P.A., is working on an impact fee study for the Santa Rosa County School Board, which also is considering new revenue sources to keep pace with the need for more classrooms.

Local homebuilders had expressed opposition to the measure, arguing impact fees simply would be passed along to consumers in the form of increased construction costs.

Higher fees on all real estate transactions, not just new construction, would be a fairer method, said Dan Gilmore, Pensacola developer and past president of the Florida Homebuilders Association.

Ron Scott of Bagdad said he doesn't like paying taxes any more than anyone else, but the county also should have considered an impact fee to help pay for law enforcement and fire protection.

"Impact fees are not a cure-all," Scott said. "It's a step in the right direction."

Milton resident James Hopmeier agreed the new tax is needed, but believes impact fees unfairly target future residents.

"This doesn't solve the problem," he said. "I think it needs to be combined with other things."



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