

Sarasota County School Board extends impact fee moratorium

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School Board members decided Tuesday to waive school impact fees for another two years, a move they hope will help the economy.

The board unanimously approved extending the moratorium on fees collected from new residences. The County Commission must also approve the moratorium for it to take effect.

The fee amounts to about \$2,000 for a new single family home. In the past, the money had gone toward building schools and adding classrooms, a way for the district to manage growth as more neighborhoods sprung up around the county.

Since the county board started the fees in 2004, the district has collected \$27 million, said Ken Marsh, the district's long range planning director.

But as construction slowed during the economic downturn, those dollars trickled to a mere \$536,000 in 2009, down from millions of dollars a few years earlier.

To help the market recover, the School Board imposed a two-year moratorium in December 2010 that expires Dec. 14. Tuesday's vote will extend the moratorium until Nov. 30, 2014, if the County Commission approves it.

“It shows we're good stewards and trying to help any way we can,” said School Board member Jane Goodwin. “It's the thing to do.”

Superintendent Lori White said she did not anticipate the need for new schools in the next five to 10 years. Refusing the money would not hurt the district financially, she added.

In other action at Tuesday's meeting, the School Board unanimously passed a resolution opposing Amendment 8 on the Nov. 6 ballot.

The amendment would lift the state's ban on giving public dollars to religious institutions.

Those pushing for the amendment say it would protect social programs run by religious institutions. Critics say the amendment would create a voucher system, stealing funding from public schools to give to private religious schools.

The measure is opposed by the Florida School Boards Association, and several other boards have also taken a stand against it.

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