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School Board considers raising home impact fees by 500 percent

By Katherine Lewis

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The Collier County School Board is considering a proposal that could hit new home buyers where it hurts.

The board is expected today to consider a recommendation to increase school impact fees on single-family homes by about 500 percent.

The proposed schedule includes a sliding scale of \$10,534 to \$12,797 for single-family homes, \$8,518 for multifamily dwellings and \$12,756 for a mobile home.

The scale would drastically increase the impact fees for the School District, which have not been increased since 1992 when the county raised the fees to \$1,778 for new single-family homes, \$827 for multifamily homes and \$1,234 for mobile homes.

Impact fees are onetime assessments imposed on new construction. They raise money to pay a portion of the cost of providing services to new development. Impact fees are assessed for each new home or business built in the county and paid by developers, who typically pass them on to consumers in the form of higher prices.

Collier County has 10 separate impact fees. The fees are also charged for roads, parks, fire departments, jail facilities, emergency medical services, government buildings and law enforcement.

Collier County's current school impact fee of about \$1,800 on a single-family home generates about \$10 million a year. That's less than the cost of one school, let alone keeping up with the growth of about 2,000 students per year.

Elementary School I, which will open in 2007 and be built near North Naples Middle School on Livingston Road, is expected to cost \$14.9 million, according to the district's capital improvement plan.

Florida's average school impact fee is around \$3,058 for a single-family home.

Although Collier County commissioners will have the final decision on raising the impact fees, School Board members will have a strong voice to help sway that opinion.

The recommendations come as the result of a report compiled by Tindale-Oliver and Associates Inc., which is the county's consultant. James Nicholas, the School Board's consultant, will also be on hand to speak to the board.

When Nicholas, a professor of urban and regional planning at the University of Florida, spoke to the board last year about impact fees, he told them that the typical way to adopt school impact fees is for the School Board to resolve that it needs the assistance of local government to maintain adequate schools.

The board would then conduct a study of school needs and costs and forward it to the county.

After considering the study, the county would do one of three things: amend its comprehensive plan, prepare

ordinances or refer the matter to a local planning agency.

In other board business today, members are also expected to hear recommendations to bring the Challenge Day program back to Collier County schools. The program, which seeks to stop bullying and create acceptance, was put on hold in January until the school district could review the program.

Several residents addressed the board in January, concerned that the program harms children by asking them to reveal personal problems or troubles in front of their peers and adults who are not qualified to help them.

Board members were also concerned about the program and that organizers did not take the program to the School Board before putting it on three times last year.

Organizers told the board they had received positive feedback from students, parents and school officials over the program. They argued that the program, which has been performed around the country and in three other Florida school districts, has made great strides in creating safer, more positive school environments.

Organizers also said the principals at each of the schools where Challenge Day was held had to approve the program's coming to the school.

The district's recommendations are to return the program to Immokalee and Golden Gate high schools as an after-school program or Saturday activity, have all volunteers screened in accordance with the Jessica Lunsford Act and require Challenge Day organizers to open their books to a public accounting of funds.

Before today's meeting, the School Board will host a capital workshop to discuss student enrollment projections, demographics, country growth and land acquisition.

The capital workshop will also include a discussion on plans for portable classrooms, the career and technical high school and athletic facility improvements.

The capital workshop begins at 12:30 p.m. to be followed by the School Board meeting at 2 p.m.

This story has been altered to correct an error that appeared in the print edition of the Daily News.

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