

## School Board puts a hold on impact fees

By Katherine Lewis

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School Board Vice Chairman Steven Donovan freely admits if he had not bought his home four years ago, he wouldn't be living in Collier County.

So, when the board discussed increasing impact fees between 400 percent and 500 percent for a single-family home, Donovan had something to say about it.

"I don't see how we can make this huge movement without justifying it," he said. "We need to go slow or offset the costs. It's the only way we can justify it. Essential service personnel who are struggling to buy a home cannot shoulder another \$10,000."

A board workshop on impact fees turned into a discussion on affordable housing Tuesday. In the end, board members said they wanted more public comment and more information before they made a recommendation to county commissioners, the board that has the authority to increase impact fees.

The School Board started its meeting by looking at a revised report prepared by the county's consultants. The new report calls for impact fees to be raised to a scale of \$8,228 to \$10,017 for a single-family home; \$2,862 for a multifamily dwelling; and \$5,724 for a mobile home.

Those figures are lower than the ones originally presented to the board. Last month, the board considered a proposal to increase impact fees to \$10,534 to \$12,797 for single-family homes, \$8,518 for multifamily dwellings and \$12,756 for a mobile home.

"The initial rates were based on the rates of six or seven counties. Some of those counties were 85 percent single-family homes," said Steve Tindale, president of Tindale-Oliver & Associates Inc., the consulting firm that prepared the impact fee report. "What changed is this distribution of the units."

Tindale said 40 percent of Collier County's housing stock is single-family homes. The remaining 60 percent is divided among multifamily homes, which make up 53 percent of the county's homes, and mobile homes.

Although the figures are lower than previously thought, the new scale drastically would increase the

impact fees for the district. The fees haven't been increased since 1992, when the county raised them to \$1,778 for new single-family homes, \$827 for multifamily homes and \$1,234 for mobile homes.

School impact fees are one-time assessments imposed on new construction on residential land. They raise money to pay a portion of the cost of providing services to new development. Impact fees are assessed for each new home and paid by developers, who typically pass them on to consumers in the form of higher prices.

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

Al Zichella, president of the Collier County Building Industry Association, said an increase in fees would affect the affordability of housing in Collier County.

"You are going to cut off the social service people, like teachers," he said. "You should do what's right for the community at large. People buy a new home today at a higher rate than people who are already here. Growth is not paying for growth. Growth is going to wind up carrying the rest."

Board member Dick Bruce said the issue came down to doing right by the people who lived here, especially district employees.

"We have not done the correct thing by our people," he said. "It is not an affordable housing issue, but an affordable wage issue. We do not have affordable wages. This is a dilemma the county will have to work on and we will have to participate. We are part of the problem, but we are also part of the solution."

The inequitable distribution bothered board member Linda Abbott. She said it was unfair that people in larger houses who have no children would have to pay more than people who might live in a condo with children. She said if the impact fees were distributed equally, it would work out to about \$5,400 per household.

"The community benefits to have good schools. In an indirect way, everyone benefits. I think it is more fair to have equitable distribution rather than make a single-family homeowner who does not have children pay more than someone who has children and lives in a multifamily home," she said.

Although board members were concerned about raising the impact fees by \$8,000 or more in one year, they agreed something needs to be done.

Collier County's current impact fee of about \$1,800 on a single-family home generates about \$8 million per year, according to Robert Spencer, the district's executive director of financial services. That's a fraction of the cost to keep up with the district's growth of 2,000 students per year.

The net impact cost of a school is \$23,850 per student. Elementary School G, which is set to open in 2007, will cost the district \$35.2 million, according to the district's capital plan.

Board members asked their consultant, James Nicholas, to make sure the new figures presented by the county's consultants were on the mark and to research how impact fees, if possible, could be equally distributed.

Although the vote on impact fees is off, the board will move ahead with its proposed impact fees public hearing at its meeting at 4 p.m. Thursday in the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Administration Center, 5775 Osceola Trail.

Board Chairwoman Kathleen Curatolo encouraged members of the public who had an opinion on the issue to speak to it or talk to School Board members about it.

"We would like whatever input they would have to share," she said. "We will need it as we continue this discussion."

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