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## Front Page November 24, 2005

### School Impact fee set By Melissa Burnsed

Baker County School Superintendent Paula Barton headed a delegation that attended the county commission meeting Monday night. During an open forum discussion that capped a marathon four and a half hour session, the delegation along with representatives from the City of Macclenny and county commissioners reached agreement to impose a school impact fee of \$1,500 on new home construction. The only governing entity not represented was the town of Glen Saint Mary.

The gathering of elected leaders gave school officials the opportunity to resolve the issue. School executive director for support services, Marcelle Richardson repeatedly pressed the gathering to give her exact numbers and conditions so the ordinance can be finalized.

The school system had commissioned a study that recommended a maximum levy of \$5,068. After public outcry at several meetings the amount was lowered to \$1,000 with an increase to \$2,000 in the second year and then further review. That was the language in the most recent draft of the ordinance.

"Growth is here and it needs to be managed carefully. We don't want to wind up like our neighboring county in debt. We don't want to be like Clay County and it is going to take vision and foresight from all of us working together to handle growth. It is our elected responsibility. It is not fair to the people living here now to do any less and we are mainly talking about new developments like the one you reviewed tonight," said school board member Dean Griffis.

Following lengthy discussion which included polling each commissioner and the representatives in attendance, the new amount of \$1,500 was settled on. That sum will be locked in for the first two years, with 20 percent increases each year thereafter. The school district will have the right to revisit the issue and seek higher dollar amounts in the future, if further studies recommend them.

Richardson was directed to work with school and county attorneys to hammer out the details and have a revised ordinance ready for the first December county commission meeting.

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