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School board sends \$3,000 fee hike to Martin commission

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Thursday, March 23, 2006

The cost of building a new home in Martin County could rise another \$3,000 after school board members agreed unanimously to triple school impact fees.

The proposed increase, which must be approved by the Martin County Commission, would put the school impact fee for an average single-family home at about \$4,555, a jump from the current charge of \$1,467.

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The district's consultant, James Nicholas of the University of Florida, said the increase is needed to address school board members' concerns about keeping up with the state's class-size reduction law and the county's continuing growth, particularly in Indiantown.

But the plan drew criticism from Kirk Sorenson, a consultant for the Treasure Coast Builders Association, who said the proposed fees did not give enough credit to rising property values. The district also should consider finding less expensive means of building schools, he said.

In response, Nicholas said his study used the most accurate data available. He pointed out that the district will spend \$180 million in the next five years to address capacity issues; of that, only about \$20 million, or 12 percent, will come from impact fees.

As for school construction costs, the bids Martin County receives are no higher than those in other counties because the same builders are bidding on the work, Nicholas said.

Board member Nancy Kline said a bigger issue was the state's shrinking contribution to school construction costs.

"If we as a district received the money that we needed to operate our schools, we wouldn't be going through this kind of process," she said.

Tuesday night was the second time in two years that the school board has recommended an increase in impact fees. Under county rules, the district must evaluate the fee schedule every two years.

In the past year, several other governing boards also have revised impact fees, which are one-time charges levied on new construction to help pay for new schools, roads, fire stations and other necessities.

In August, Martin County commissioners increased charges for single-family homes about 40 percent.

Last month, the Stuart commission revised the city's impact fees, tacking on more than \$600 to the cost of building a new home in the city.

The Treasure Coast Builders Association also criticized those increases.




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