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**01/22/06**

### School district studies impact fees

Because of an impending growth explosion, the Charlotte County school district is exploring the idea of enacting impact fees.

The possible developments of Babcock Ranch, a project near U.S. 17 and another development off

Burnt Store Road could mean the need for many new schools, officials say.

"We're on the verge of a huge explosion of growth," said Lee Swift, a School Board member.

Impact fees are assessed to help cover the cost of infrastructure for new growth.

How much developers help with building and funding infrastructure, such as schools, will be taken into consideration when school officials decide whether to impose impact fees.

"It would be irresponsible if we didn't look at all funding sources," said Sue Sifrit, School Board chairwoman.

Right now the school district is managing with its annual growth rate of 300 to 400 students a year, Swift said. But if the district growth spikes to 700 to 1,200 new students a year, the game plan must change, he said.

At this time, the school district is waiting for results from an impact study conducted by University of Florida professor James C. Nicholas. Nicholas was hired by the county to prepare a study for increasing local impact fees.

According to the study, a 251 percent increase in impact fees would raise more than \$66 million through 2010.

The study says higher fees would generate an additional \$46 million for road construction through 2010.

It is expected that 6,230 new homes will be built in the county in the next five years, according to the study.

Right now, new homeowners pay \$2,642 in impact fees, plus another \$5,300 for utility connection fees, which are substantially lower than those levied in other area counties, according

to the study.

The study says impact fees should increase by \$6,621 to \$9,263.

The county doesn't assess an impact fee to subsidize new school construction.


The school district joined the county on the study to save money.

The study is not expected to be released until late February or early March, said Dave Gayler, the superintendent of the school district. Nicholas needed a year's worth of post-storm data before proceeding.

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**BY ELLA NAYOR**

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