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School impact fees could double

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School impact fees should nearly double so builders of new homes in Lee County would pay their fair share to construct new schools, according to a consultant's study released today.

The single-family home rate of \$2,232 would increase to \$4,345; multi-family units would rise from \$691 to \$1,719; and mobile homes would jump from \$425 to \$990. Home builders pay one-time impact fees on new construction, but usually pass that cost onto homeowners in the form of higher sales prices. Those who buy existing homes do not pay impact fees.

Texas-based Duncan Associates analyzed costs of school construction, technology, land, utilities and other factors to determine the revised amounts. The previous rates generated about \$45 million annually, almost triple the amount projected when fees first were adopted in November 2001.

Lee County Commissioners, not the school board, vote to set impact fees for schools, parks, emergency service and roads. School board attorney Keith Martin said that vote likely would come in November.

Meanwhile, the school district's budget staff will spend the next few days analyzing the report. The school board has considered sponsoring a half-cent sales tax referendum in November, an initiative that would generate \$47 million annually. Higher impact fee revenue could eliminate the need for a sales tax; that discussion will occur at a school board meeting on Tuesday.

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