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## Seminole impact fees could triple

### A School Board consultant urges the increase; a panel asks for an even higher fee.

Dave Weber  
Sentinel Staff Writer

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SANFORD -- A consultant for the Seminole County School Board has recommended more than tripling the school impact fees on new homes, but a committee studying ways to pay for classroom construction wants them edged up even higher.

A bigger increase would put Seminole's school-impact fees within range of other Central Florida counties, committee members argue. And the extra cash still won't cover the cost of classrooms needed to handle the influx of new residents, they say.

"If we take the impact fee and quadruple it, it is only going to build one elementary school a year," said George Kosmac, deputy superintendent of schools.

The TischlerBise planning firm of Bethesda, Md., has proposed a school impact fee of \$4,991 for a single-family home. Their proposal came after several weeks of studying the effects of new homes on enrollment in county schools, which hit 66,123 students this month. The current impact fee of \$1,384 hasn't changed since 1992.

But the School Board's Educational Advisory Committee told consultant Carson Bise this week to take a sharper pencil to the numbers. Committee members suggested a figure closer to \$7,000 for single-family homes, which Bise said his research could support.

"I would be cautious about being too conservative," said Gary Brender, a Lake Mary city commissioner serving on the committee, pointing to recent sharp construction increases that were not included in the study.

Impact fees also would increase for town houses, multifamily units and mobile homes, although they would be less than the amount for a single-family home.

Seminole's school-impact fees are the lowest in the area. Orange County's fee is \$7,000, and Lake County charges \$7,055 per home.

Osceola County dropped its school-impact fee to \$7,608 after a judge in November sided with the Home Builders Association of Metro Orlando and said \$9,708 was too high. But the Osceola School Board already is working on raising the fee, citing rising construction costs.

The Seminole committee wants to come up with a number that developers will pay without complaining. Developers won't object to higher fees if they are promised good schools, such as those in Seminole, the consultant said.

"The smart developer likes impact fees because they guarantee a quality of life," Bise said.

The committee hopes to recommend an impact-fee increase to the School Board by summer. The board in turn will pass the proposal on to the County Commission, which has authority to increase the fee.

The current fee raises about \$4 million a year. Officials are eyeing a jump to \$16 million.

But a lot more money is needed to cover Seminole's school-construction costs. This year alone, the district set aside \$85 million for school construction, additions and repairs.

Not all of the expense is due to new residents. Some old school buildings must be replaced, and the state class-size amendment requiring fewer students in each class calls for more rooms.

To meet the expenses, the committee also is considering whether a bond referendum and an extension or replacement of the current sales tax for schools is needed. The school system gets one-fourth of the county's one-cent sales tax, which brings in about \$13 million a year but expires in 2011.

*Dave Weber can be reached at [dweber@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:dweber@orlandosentinel.com) or 407-320-0915.*

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