

St. Lucie OKs hike in impact fees of \$3,000 per new home

By Eric Pfahler

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY – Impact fees will go up by about \$3,000 on new homes after County Commissioners opted early Wednesday to follow staff recommendations on adjusting the fees.

The County Commission voted 4-1 with Commissioner Chris Craft voting against.

Impact fees are taxes on new homes and buildings designed to pay for schools, parks, libraries and other things needed for such developments. The county followed the guidelines of consultant James Nicholas, who analyzed the county's impact fees. Nicholas said he did not see impact fees changing the amount of building and home buying in the county, noting there were impact fees during the boom.

“Everyone of those homes paid an impact fee,” Nicholas said. “It didn't slow them down.”

Attorney Johnathan Ferguson said he questioned the county's use of driving trip data put too great of a cost on commercial real estate and the use of per-acre values for beach parks among other quibbles. Ferguson said he did not believe the impact fees would have a big effect on building or home purchasing, though he wanted to make sure the data was accurate.

“My only issue is that the impact fees have to be fair,” Ferguson said.

The impact fees are separated into different categories. Those affecting public buildings — a category that would decrease -- will take effect April 1, 2010, while increases for roads and parks impacts will be phased in with 50 percent of the increase coming in April 1, 2010 and the other 50 percent taking effect on Dec. 1, 2010.

The total would increase impact fees on mainland single-family homes from \$9,601 to \$12,582.

Craft said he did not think now was a good time to raise impact fees, especially since few houses are being built. Craft said he did not mind changing the methodology, but he did not want to change impact fee collections until after the economy begins to improve.

“We're not seeing a tremendous influx of cash because of this,” Craft said.

But Commissioner Doug Coward said the money would help to make sure that there's not a gap in collecting fees to pay for growth.

Nicholas said he did not believe a lot of money would be lost by phasing in the collections because there are so many vacant homes in the county. However, Nicholas said the county needed to update the data the county uses to determine impact fees.

"The county is really very late on this," Nicholas said. "We started this in '07."



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