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St. Lucie school impact fee on new homes would go up 55% in plan

By Rebecca Panoff
staff writer

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Beginning Oct. 1, every new single-family home built in St. Lucie County could pay 55 percent more in school impact fees.

The county Planning and Zoning Board approved an increase in educational impact fees for single- and multifamily homes Thursday. The proposed increase would raise school impact fees for a single-family house from \$3,192 to \$4,956, and would go from \$2,505 to \$2,536 for a multifamily home.

The impact fees for mobile homes and recreational vehicles would decrease by 18 percent from \$1,749 to \$1,430 because the student generation rate is less than single- and multifamily homes, according to a school impact fee report by University of Florida professor James C. Nicholas.

"Most of the growth here is in single family, and of course single family is where you find people with school-aged children," Nicholas said.

Nicholas said about 82 percent of new students in the county come from new home construction.

Educational impact fees are one-time charges on new construction used to pay for costs such as busses and new schools.

According to Schools Superintendent Michael Lannon, the School District will need to add more than 25 new schools in the next 20 years to compensate for growth in the county.

The impact fee has the support of the Treasure Coast Builders Association, said president Don Santos during public comment.

"If we want to have a sustainable community and work- force ... we better participate in the process," he said. "We think this is a fair impact fee."

Along with the increase in impact fees, the St. Lucie County School District hopes the half percent sales tax that runs out in June 2006 will be renewed when it goes to voters Oct. 18. The district also hopes to deal with growth by passing a bond referendum and continuing to collect

property taxes.

The board also recommended approval of an ordinance that would allow the county to collect building, road and park impact fees separate from the city of Port St. Lucie when the city stops collecting those fees for the county Oct. 1.

"The county feels like a victim when it comes to impact fees," County Administrator Doug Anderson said.

The plan would allow the county to continue collecting impact fees from new construction in Port St. Lucie that pays for road construction and maintenance like the expansion project on Midway Road, building construction like the new Clerk of Courts building and construction and maintenance of county parks.

The county would notify property owners they owe a fee if that fee is not paid by a due date, and then the county would place a lien on the property, according to Assistant County Attorney Heather Young.

The county could close on that lien after one year.

The city and county will discuss impact fees at a joint meeting Aug. 26 in Port St. Lucie, but Anderson said the ordinance would be the county's "fall back position if things don't work out with the city of Port St. Lucie."

The board of county commissioners is scheduled to vote on the educational impact fees and building, road and park impact fee ordinance Sept. 6.

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Educational facilities impact fees

Present

Single Family: \$3,192

Multifamily: \$2,505

Mobile Home and Recreational Vehicle: \$1,749

Proposed

Single Family: \$4,956

Multifamily: \$2,536

Mobile Home and Recreational Vehicle: \$1,430

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