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Stuart endorses impact fee hike

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By [Rachel Simmons](#)*Palm Beach Post Staff Writer*

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STUART — The cost of building a new home in the city would jump more than \$2,200 under a proposal tentatively approved Monday by city commissioners.

Despite concerns from local builders that they would face "double billing," the commission gave first approval in a 3-0 vote to new impact fees for roads and municipal buildings, which would tack on \$1,588 and \$405 respectively to the cost of building a single-family, detached home in the city.

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The proposal also would more than double the existing parks impact fee for single-family homes, raising the figure from \$534 to \$1,150. On the flip side, fire and police impact fees for single-family homes would drop about 16 percent and 73 percent, respectively, under the plan.

Still, if the proposed ordinance wins final approval later this month, the total impact fees for a new home in the city would jump from \$1,223 to \$3,479, an increase of about 184 percent.

The new impact fees also would apply to commercial buildings and multifamily residential units.

Last spring, city commissioners agreed to hire the Maryland consulting firm TischlerBise to study impact fees after city staff pointed out that they had not been revised for several years. The fees, one-time charges on new construction, are designed to offset the costs of growth.

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Stuart is not the only community rethinking impact fees. In August, Martin County officials revised their fees, increasing charges for single-family homes about 40 percent. Marinas, small warehouses and convenience stores saw increases of more than 100 percent on some impact fees.

As for Stuart's proposed increases, the Treasure Coast Builders Association raised concerns that the fee hikes would dissuade development in the city, since builders would be paying impact fees to both the city and the county for things like roads.

Vice Mayor Mary Hutchinson pointed out that the city fees would go toward road projects not listed among the county's priorities. The fees also would pay the city's share for county road projects, like the proposed Green River Parkway.

But Kirk Sorenson, a consultant hired by the builders association, said he wasn't convinced that the new city road fees wouldn't constitute "double billing," since the city already collects impact fees for the county, which has agreed to spend some of those fees on city roads.

City staff, meanwhile, are considering another impact fee, for sanitation, suggested by TischlerBise. Already, the city's proposed \$450 municipal facility impact fee for single-family homes is higher than the \$320 fee recommended by the firm. City staff said the recommendation was too low, especially in light of the tight finances of the city's proposed new public safety building, which is about \$2 million over budget.

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