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Study could justify higher fees

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BROOKSVILLE — Today, Hernando County's school impact fees are \$4,266 for a 2,000-square-foot, single-family home with three bedrooms.

That cost, however, could increase as a result of a unanimous school board vote Tuesday night.

The county school board voted to approve a \$64,200 impact fee study that school officials hope will justify the current impact fees, and perhaps pave the way for even higher fees.

The study will be conducted by Tallahassee firm Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson and Redmond, Wash. firm Henderson, Young & Co.

The two firms will work together to identify if the \$4,266 cost is enough to pay for the impact of growth in the area.

"County methodology employed in the past is increasingly open to challenge. This study fills those gaps," said school board chairman Jim Malcolm.

Malcolm said that by employing the two firms to conduct this study, the school board would be protecting the county and the school district from lawsuits.

The firms' past research has helped Osceola County schools justify a \$7,608 school impact fee on single-family homes. That school district won a lawsuit brought by the home builders associations in that area.

However, the study could also provide an added benefit to the school district. According to school district chief financial officer Deborah Bruggink, the study's findings could determine that Hernando County's school impact fees are too low to support growth.

"(The study will) demographically tell us in one sense that we may not be where we should be," Bruggink said. "State money isn't as lucrative as it has been for us. Proactively, are we getting as much as we are entitled to get?"

Bruggink's words drew criticism from school board members.

"My concern is we don't get the most. We don't get the least. We're just about in the middle," said board member Sandra Nicholson. "I would not feel comfortable asking the home builders for more."

Impact fees are a one-time fee associated with building costs, usually paid by developers and homeowners. Bruggink said she believed that developers are looking for these types of studies to justify the cost of the fees.

"This would be a win-win for this district," Bruggink said.

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