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Volusia School Board sets 2-year moratorium on impact fees

By LINDA TRIMBLE, Education writer 

DELAND -- A two-year impact fee moratorium won approval from the Volusia County School Board on Tuesday in a move a homebuilders' official expects will help the area's construction industry recover from the recession.

"We've had tremendous activity since the first of the year," said Sandy Burke Bishop, executive officer of the Volusia Building Industry Association. "Everybody is hopeful."

Coupled with other impact fee suspensions approved in recent months by the Volusia County Council and several cities, Bishop said people building homes in DeLand, Daytona Beach and South Daytona could expect a \$10,000 to \$12,000 break on the price.

Impact fees are charged to developers -- and passed along to their customers -- to pay for roads, parks, schools and other amenities needed to serve residents of new housing.

The two-year suspension of the \$6,066 school impact fee for each new housing unit is retroactive to Jan. 1. It grew out of a January settlement with the Volusia Building Industry Association, which had sued to challenge a 2005 impact fee revision in which the group claimed the formula for determining the fee was misapplied.

The School Board approved the moratorium unanimously Tuesday although member Judy Conte said she doesn't believe it will boost housing construction. She also said it's unfair to developers who built homes while the impact fee was in effect and fears builders will try to argue against the fee's reinstatement in December 2013.

School Board member Candace Lankford said the housing industry is a vital part of the community.

"We are extending a helping hand to that community," she said. "I think it's appropriate at this time."

A joint committee with representatives of the School Board and homebuilders will meet during the moratorium to try to come up with a school impact fee that suits both sides. If they fail, the \$6,066 fee will be reinstated as of Jan. 1, 2014.

In other business Tuesday, the School Board:

- Agreed to advertise revisions to the dress code that would allow students to wear sunglasses when they're outside and hats during cold weather. The revisions, subject to a public hearing before final approval, also clarify that lower garments must be free of rips, offensive language and see-through materials.

- Approved minor changes to the attendance zones for DeLand and Southwestern middle schools in DeLand, South Daytona Elementary and Turie T. Small Elementary to save money on busing and fill seats at schools with extra space.

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