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Charlotte County boosts impact fees

By [Patrick Whittle](#)

CHARLOTTE COUNTY -- Charlotte County's new impact fees add more than \$5,000 to the cost of building a typical single-family home here, possibly signaling an end to the county's status as a prime spot to build cheap housing near the Gulf of Mexico.

It is the first time the county has updated the fees in 12 years.

The increased fees, which are taxes charged on new construction to help pay for population growth, were approved by the County Commission on Tuesday and take effect on June 1.

The fees will charge a builder \$4.19 per square foot for a new house, which amounts to \$8,380 for a 2,000-square-foot home. The current fees, which are not based on square-footage, are \$2,510 for a single-family home.

The commission voted to adjust the impact fees every year so future increases aren't so dramatic.

The county originally considered raising the impact fees even higher, to \$9,263, but cut the amount after some builders and homeowners charged that increase was too high.

"Consider looking at additional revenue sources so the burden is spread throughout the county, not just on new construction," said Suzanne Graham, president of the Charlotte-DeSoto Building Industry Association.

The new fees are based on a study by University of Florida professor James Nicholas. He is also working on a school impact fee for Charlotte.

Charlotte County's current impact fees were \$3,700 less than the state average, about \$3,000 less than Sarasota County and about \$9,000 less than Manatee County in 2005. It was hard to avoid the sticker-shock this time, County Commissioner Matt DeBoer said.

"Impact fees are a bitter pill," he said. "We need to just get it done."

The county's new impact fees set rates for all new buildings, including offices, medical facilities and stores. The fees range from \$1,281 per 1,000 square feet for a mini-warehouse to more than \$19,000 per 1,000 square feet for a movie theater.

Builders who are about to start work might be able to avoid the new fees.

Residential builders who have a signed contract can pay the old fees if they submit an application by Dec. 1. Builders handling nonresidential structures, such as stores, offices or medical buildings, have until May 31, 2007.

The increased fees help generate revenue to fund the county's roads, public buildings and parks, budget officer Ray Sandrock said. However, the county also will need to look at other sources of funding for infrastructure to keep in step with growing population, he said.

Sandrock has cited the fact that the county's road budget is operating at more than a \$100 million deficit as evidence that Charlotte's taxes aren't in step with growth.

"It's going to take more than just impact fees," he said.

Sandrock could not say when a proposal for a school impact fee would be ready. Charlotte has grown from 111,000 residents in 1990 to more than 157,000 last year, and the county's school system has grown in step.

Affordable housing advocates have cautioned the county that higher fees could price working residents out of a home. Commissioners said the county might debate that issue at a later meeting.

Representatives from the building industry have questioned the need for heavy impact fees since the summer, when county officials started talking about raising them. Some builders, several of whom spoke Tuesday, fear heavy fees will stunt business.

County Commissioner Tom D'Aprile said Charlotte needs to spread the cost of growth around the county in the future or risk hurting the building industry.

"It the largest industry we have in Charlotte County. If we cripple it, we will be crippled," D'Aprile said.
