

A new plan in impact fees fight

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Published January 18, 2007

INVERNESS - As commissioners gear up for another bitter battle over impact fees next week, commission Chairman Dennis Damato says he has a new proposal.

For schools and transportation, he said, commissioners should adopt fees recommended by the county's Planning and Development Review Board. The remaining impact fees should fall in line with recommendations from the county consultant, he said.

That would mean the transportation impact fee for a 2,000-square-foot single-family home would be \$3,979. The schools impact fee would be \$2,067.

And the total impact fees would be \$8,398 - a 26 percent increase from the existing fees of \$6,664. For commercial projects, the increase would be about 10 percent, he said.

"Things should be reasonable for the times that we're in," he said.

The numbers proposed by consultant Tindale-Oliver and Associates - totaling more than \$16,000 for a single-family home - are too high for residents and businesses in Citrus, he said.

"There needs to be a discussion in the community about numbers," he said.

Damato said his proposal would provide revenue that the School Board "can live with." And the lower transportation impact fees would "give the gas tax a chance to work" to help fund road construction projects, he said.

At a workshop last month, Damato, Commissioner Gary Bartell and Commissioner John Thrumston said phasing in fees for public schools and transportation would be best. Commissioners Vicki Phillips and Joyce Valentino seemed intent on adopting new fees without delay, though they are open to studying phasing plans.

Bartell's idea - charging only 50 percent of the new fees for schools and transportation for the first six months of the new schedule - got the most discussion.

Damato said Wednesday that he wanted to implement new fees now and review them in three years.

Bartell said he had not heard about Damato's proposal Wednesday. But he said going lower than the impact fee level he proposed last month could have a significant impact on county projects.

"We still have the projects on the table, but how are you going to pay for them?" he asked. "Somebody has to pay the bill. That's the whole issue."

Assistant County Administrator Tom Dick said he received a copy of Damato's proposal - a chart detailing current impact fee levels, proposed increases and new total numbers - Wednesday morning. Dick said he would pass it on to other commissioners before next week's impact fee hearing.

The question, Dick said, is not whether the county could adopt the impact fees the consultant recommended. "Does

that mean it's the right thing to do?"

Commissioners are slated to have their final hearing on impact fees at 9 a.m. Jan. 25 at the Citrus County Courthouse, 110 N Apopka Ave., Inverness.

Times staff writer Jim Ross contributed to this report. Catherine E. Shoichet can be reached at cshoichet@sptimes.com or 860-7309.

Fast Facts:

How the figures break down

The County Commission is considering significant impact fee increases. Commission Chairman Dennis Damato has proposed adopting a consultant's recommendation for parks, public buildings, fire, law, library and EMS impact fees.

But for schools and transportation, Damato wants to go with numbers proposed by the county's Planning and Development Review Board. Here's a look at the numbers.

Transportation:

Current: \$3,612

Damato's proposal: \$3,979

County consultant's proposal: \$9,705

Schools

Current: \$1,917

Damato's proposal: \$2,067

County consultant's proposal: \$4,218

Sources: Commission Chairman Dennis Damato, county and consultant documents

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