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Many Citrus County Builders Angry Over Increase in Impact Fees

By **Eric Brennan**

After last week's vote by Citrus County commissioners, many builders were upset by the decision to raise the building impact fees. Nearly 200 people, many builders and their sub contractors packed into the cramped commission chambers. The chairman, Dennis Damato asked standing audience members and the overflowing guests to the jury overflow room. That's when the crowd of mostly construction workers started to get anxious. The chairman explained that the fire marshal would shut down the meeting if the room was full beyond capacity. Cries of "Shut it down" and "We'll get arrested first" echoed in the room. No one moved. The chairman, Damato, adjourned the meeting. Officials helped to persuade the crowd to gather in the overflow room, and the meeting was resumed, with a considerable delay.

Citrus County commissioners voted 3-2 to raise the impact fees. They opted to only raise them by 50% of the original choice. Although many county officials were happy with the impact fee increase, county builders have a different perspective. Local general contractor, Ed Brennan of James E. Brennan Corp. had this to say about the decision to raise impact fees "Its retarded, now I have to go to a different county to do business, maybe even another state." Not only are the big builders hurting for work, there is a huge trickle down effect to the less wealthy sub contractors and their even poorer workers. One local worker said " I don't know what I can do other than try to find work in another county. This ones had it." Even some small businesses such as restaurants and convenience stores will take a hit. Many stores worry that lunch time and after work sales will plummet.

So what does this mean for Citrus County? According to outside comparison studies made by Tindale-Oliver, Tindale-Oliver used outside models from other counties, and not a local study as state law dictates. Although representatives from the builders association repeatedly criticized its findings, it was not until after the commissioners had made their decision did they decide to do a study on its impact of local business. So in the mean time, impact fees have increased at a time when building in this county is at a drizzle. It may even mean lower impact fee money even though the rate was raised. Many now hope the decision hasn't sunk the ship that's now taking on water.

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