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## City says OK to impact fees: City, county and school board fees could total \$9,000

By Chauna Aguilar,  
Okeechobee News



Retired Circuit Judge Honorable William Hendry (left) swore in the newly elected City Council Members (standing left to right) Clayton Williams, Dowling Watford and Lowry Markham at the city council meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 2. Okeechobee News/Chauna Aguilar

New businesses and residential homes within the City of Okeechobee will have impact fees imposed in the near future.

This will go in line with neighboring cities and counties as well as Okeechobee County and the Okeechobee County School Board who are reaching the final stages of their own study on impact fees.

Walter Keller, of Walter H. Keller, Inc., Consulting Engineers & Planning, prepared an impact fee study with a preliminary fee estimate for the Okeechobee City Council to review at their meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 2.

Mr. Keller presented the study to the council showing impact fees based on the estimated growth for the next 10 years.

Estimated fees for the City of Okeechobee for a residential use will be approximately \$2,970. These fees will be separated into three categories: fire, police and public works.

The fees are broken down as follows: fire - \$923, police - \$339 and public works - \$1,708.

There will be three levels of residential impact fees - single family, multi-family and mobile home.

Commercial fees have yet to be calculated but they will be separated into the same categories according to the specific commercial use, and will depend on the intensity by which the city is impacted.

These fees will apply for all new construction within the city limits. This includes any new development that has to go through the building permit stage.

Impact fees will also apply to a development that is changing an existing use from residential to commercial. The impact fees will fall under new use and will take into account the level of intensity that a commercial establishment would entail.

Impact fees depend on a Capital Improvement Plan that details what

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improvements are to be made with the fees collected, with additional funds from other sources.

The city is required to choose improvements that will attribute to the new residents or commercial establishments. Adjustments are made to the improvements based on the benefits that the new residents will acquire from the improvement.

Impact fees raise approximately 20 percent of the cost of the improvements.

The city has tentatively chosen the following items within the three categories:

Fire - mini pumper/brush vehicle, training facility with Okeechobee County Fire/Rescue, ladder truck, fire engine/pumper, communication system, new tone-out system for dispatchers and Special Ops, Inc. Homeland Security.

The total estimated cost of these items is \$2,900,000.

Impact fees are projected to raise \$807,500 of these costs. The remaining cost would have to come from other sources.

Other items being considered are law enforcement-tasers, Motorola radios and command system, law enforcement Cad system, crime scene van and equipment, evidence drying cabinet, laptops and projector, DVD digital video system, intoxilizer, office expansion and upgrade and squad cars and equipment. The total estimated cost of these items is \$1,614,380, with impact fees estimated to raise \$320,399.

Also under consideration are: public works - tractor mowers, dump trucks, sidewalks, building equipment, buildings, drainage improvements, road construction, studies and improvement programming. The total estimated cost of these items is \$7,660,000, with impact fees raising approximately \$1,553,750.

The city is required to complete the items on their Capital Improvement Plan within 10 years. The city can, however, adjust the plan according to growth trends within that time period.

The plan can be reviewed in three to five years based on the need of changes in proposed growth. If the growth is slower than intended, the fees can be lessened by taking some of the improvements off of the plan.

If the growth is higher than expected, the city can add additional improvements to the plan. The fees can only be used for new improvements, not to correct a pre-existing deficiency.

According to Mr. Keller, the Okeechobee County School Board is currently bringing an ordinance before the Okeechobee County Board of County Commissioners for their impact fees.

According to the school board's impact fee study, the estimated costs for each dwelling unit are: single family - \$3,384; multi-family - \$1,977; and, mobile home - \$2,366.

With the additional impact fees from the county - which are estimated to also be around \$3,000 - new residential developments would incur approximately \$9,000 in impact fees.

These costs would be added to any new developments after the ordinance has passed.

"Impact fees are not a panacea or a perfect thing that are going to solve all your funding problems," said Mr. Keller. "What it does for you is it gives you an extra source of funding that can help you do your capital improvements. If you didn't have an impact fee, then the 20 percent that you get from the fees you would have to find from another source.

"It is helpful to you and I believe beneficial, as well as a commitment to these capital improvements," he added.

The council gave Mr. Keller direction to go ahead with the ordinance as proposed.

According to Mr. Keller, he can have an ordinance to the city within approximately 45 days. An ordinance takes two readings - a first reading and then a final reading which will take approximately one month for adoption.

Post your opinions in the Public Issues Forum at [www.newszap.com](http://www.newszap.com). Reporter Chauna Aguilar may be reached at [caguilar@newszap.com](mailto:caguilar@newszap.com).

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