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Commission reduces impact fees by half

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By ED SCOTT
Staff Writer

NORTH PORT – Hoping to spur economic growth, city commissioners voted Monday to reduce most impact fees on new development by 50 percent.

The builder of a new, single-family residential home in North Port currently pays \$10,467 in impact fees to three jurisdictions – \$6,725 to the city, \$2,032 to the Sarasota County School District and \$1,710 to Sarasota County.

Impact fees for a new commercial development in North Port total \$14,259.

Fees paid to the county and the school district are not affected by the city commission's vote.

Impact fees are collected on any new residential and commercial development within the city.

City fees are collected to pay for capital improvement projects for transportation, police, fire, parks and recreation, government administration, solid waste and utilities. Fees are paid to Sarasota County for general government, justice, library and roads.

The 4-1 vote will result in halving all city impact fees – excluding utilities capacity fee and parks and recreation – for a year and a half. After 18 months, the rates will revert to their current levels, although commissioners reserve the right to increase the fees at that time.

Commissioner Tom Jones dissented.

"Will this achieve our goal? I personally don't think that it will," he said.

Commissioners discussed comparisons of impact fees with unincorporated Sarasota County (\$11,107 for single family; \$13,493 for commercial) and Charlotte County (\$4,143 for single family, \$8,004 for commercial in Punta Gorda; and \$2,510 for single family, \$3,553 for commercial in unincorporated Charlotte).

No timeline was confirmed Monday for the reduction.

Commissioners agreed to hold a workshop about targeted economic development. They want to allow themselves flexibility to abate or reduce impact fees for targeted industries and to decide which areas of town would be targeted for such incentives.

That would give Economic Development Manager Allan Lane a tool to generate interest in the city among relocating or

expanding businesses, such as hotel chains and to come to commission on a case-by-case basis and ask for fee alterations. Commission Chair Vanessa Carusone called giving Lane that tool "imperative."

"That leniency would have more of an effect than that 50 percent reduction," Carusone said.

Commissioner Jim Blucher pointed out that the Business and Economic Development Advisory Board also will look at business incentives.

Commissioners agreed to have another methodology study completed on impact fees and possibly create a fee regarding new development that includes septic tanks.

A past commission had an impact fee study done three years ago, but that study was not implemented.

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