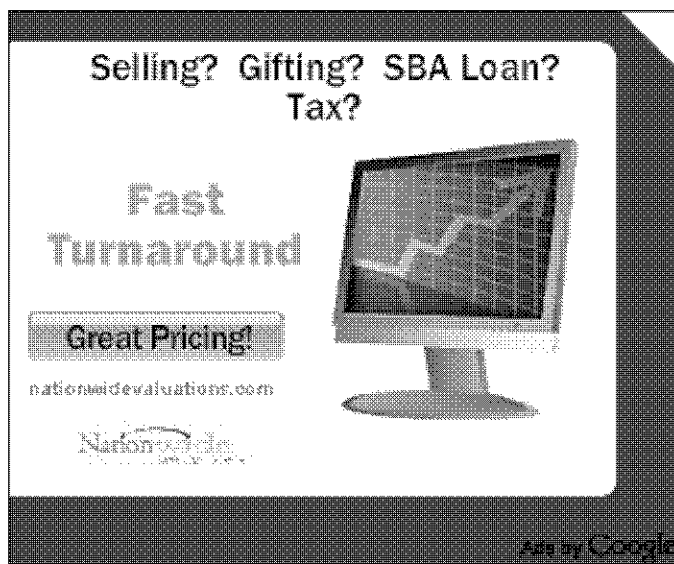


County looks at suspending impact fees

Carl Mario Nudi

BRADENTON, Apr 03, 2009 (The Bradenton Herald - McClatchy-Tribune Information Services via COMTEX) --

The Manatee County administrator recommended Thursday cutting road impact fees by 25 percent, while commissioners leaned more toward eliminating all impact fees for a year.



Citing the need to create jobs, Commissioner Donna Hayes was the first to suggest deferring county impact fees for a year.

"We have to act quickly," Hayes said. "We are in very difficult economic times."

Commissioners reacted after hearing a consultant explain how impact fees for roads should be increased to pay for the effects of new development, and listening to several developers say how they need relief from the fees to jump-start their projects.

Randy Young, of Henderson, Young and Co., outlining how the county now calculates impact fees and a new method he was proposing.

Young said when he started researching the data for his report a lot of changes happened in the Manatee County economy, including the collapse of the housing market.

Because of the economic downturn, the construction of new homes in the county has almost come to a stop, eliminating the need for new roads. At the same time, the cost to construct new roads also has declined.

Young said changing the impact fee structure would not rescue the housing market.

"There's a big stock of housing out there," he said. "If the county didn't have impact fees today (the developers) are not going to start building them."

Developers, contractors and real estate business people lined up behind the podium to say otherwise.

Many of them related how they have had to lay off many of their workers because of the slump.

Britt Williams, of Bruce Williams Homes, said there are home buyers looking from Naples to Pasco County for the best deal and would make the leap if the cost was reduced \$10,000.

Suspending impact fees would lower the cost, Williams said.

In a telephone interview after the meeting, Sean Snaith, executive director of University of Central Florida's Institute of Economic Competitiveness, said impact fees probably have little to do with the housing crisis, and suspending them would not stimulate job creation.

"We faced the same concerns with Amendment 1 (which reduced property taxes)," Snaith said. "They said it was going to jump start the economy, but it only furthered the crisis."

County Administrator Ed Hunzeker recommended cutting road impact fees 25 percent, which would effectively reduce the fees by 50 percent when combined with the Manatee County School District's proposal to suspend impact fees for one year.

Hunzeker also said commissioners should look at all the impact fees, which are also levied for parks, public safety and utilities.

Assistant County Attorney Bill Clague warned commissioners not to act too hastily.

Clague said it may be easier to suspend impact fees than to reinstate them.

Commission Chairwoman Gwen Brown did not want the commission to make any decisions until they see what capital improvement projects would be affected.

The commissioners will discuss the issue at 3 p.m. Tuesday during their regular meeting.

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