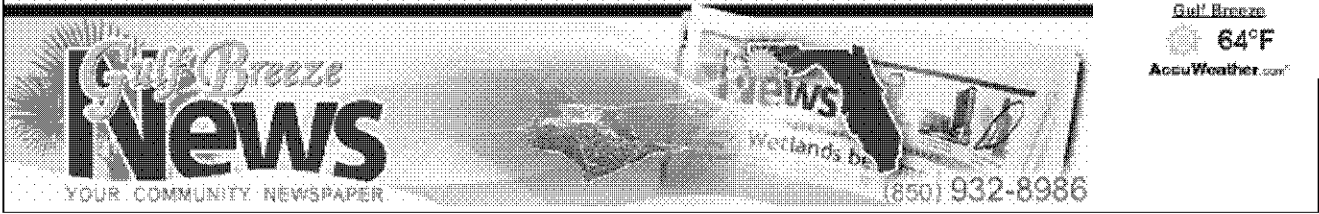


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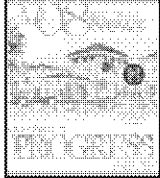


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County suspends impact fees
BY PAM BRANNON Gulf Breeze News
pam@gulfbreezenews.com

Businesses or industries purchasing a building permit in Santa Rosa County in 2009 will not have to pay county impact fees.

Also, any business already making installment payments on its impact fees will have those payments suspended until 2010. The county also will give refunds to 34 individuals who have already paid impact fees since October 2007.

County commissioners recently agreed to grant a one-year moratorium on all transportation impact fees for fiscal year of 2009. During a workshop for strategic planning, commissioners discussed the economic effects of impact fee reductions and a one-year moratorium of collecting absolutely no impact fees for 12 months. The county's staff reports showed an impact fee moratorium

for one year would encourage

construction in both commercial and residential industries.

Commissioner Jim Williamson said this amounts to a local stimulus package.

"I think we need to do everything we can, as a county government, to put people back to work in our county and to keep them working," Williamson said. "We need to do this because I am sure it will encourage more construction, which will carry over into other supporting industries and keep people working."

Commissioner Gordon Goodin said if the moratorium was extended past one year it could cause problems with state funding, as well as road projects already scheduled.

"But it should not cause a problem if it is only for 12 months," Goodin said. "And we can take a look at it

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again in December and see how much stimulus it has or has not caused. I do think this will help some people who are sitting on the fence whether to go ahead and build right now take that step, if they don't have these impact fees to have to come up with when they first get their building permits."

Williamson would also like to look at permit fees.

"I really believe we need to lower permit fees concurrent with the moratorium on impact fees," Williamson said. "Right now, we have a staff that is going to get paid whether they do anything or not. So let's reduce permit fees and stop collecting impact fees for a year and see where that leads us. I believe it will stimulate the local economy."

Builder and developer Mark Porter of Celebrity Homes told commissioners that it is not just the builders and their crews who benefit from such a move.

"(But) for every home built in the county, you put at least 100 people to work," he said.

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