

WFTV.com

Developers Skipping Out On Payments To County

POSTED: 9:25 am EST February 5, 2008
UPDATED: 5:30 pm EST February 5, 2008



ORANGE COUNTY, Fla. -- Orange County Commissioner Theresa Jacobs was stunned to find out certain commercial developers were allowed to skip out on their impact fee payments until the buildings were ready to occupy. It's happened for years in some cases.

"It's a loan from the county, which really means it's a loan from taxpayers to the commercial developer," said Rollins College professor Rick Fogelsong.

Fogelsong is a political ethics expert at Rollins College. He says incentives such as the existing impact fee deferment aren't needed locally.

"If we had trouble here in Orlando, FL trying to get people to build hotels, you could make a case that we ought to reduce impact fees," said Fogelsong.

But for the last 10 years developers behind the Bonnet Creek Resort, Hilton Hotels, and several malls have been allowed to keep tens of millions of dollars in their bank accounts, while taxpayers foot the bill for roads, schools and fire and police protection. In 2007 the figure topped 12 million dollars. Even so Orange County's growth management department still supports the idea.

Sometimes, when the developments have actually opened, they still refused to pay their impact fees. The county had to place liens on 39 businesses this year because they didn't pay the fee that ever other county in Central Florida requires before a developer breaks ground.

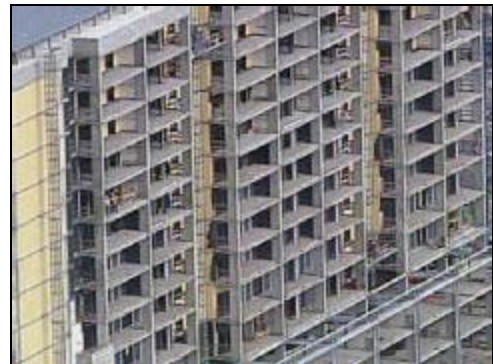
Commissioner Jacobs says the perk was created by a commission in the 1990s and now believes it's time to give it a second look.

"I don't want to second guess the judgment of the commission in 1996 when they adopted this policy, but were not in 1996 anymore," said Jacobs. "We're in 2007 we have a different reality, and it's time to take a hard look at the impact fees we charge and when we collect them."

The program was intended to be a pilot program, but has now been in existence for over 10 years.

Copyright 2008 by wftv.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Related To Story



Video: [Developers Not Paying Impact Fees](#)