Stimulus Package To Be Discussed Tuesday

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SEBRING — The Highlands County commissioners meeting today should have plenty of "stimulating" conversation.

After talking about it in news interviews, before a homeowners group, and by responding to many calls and e-mails about his ideas, county Commissioner Guy Maxcy today will formally proposed his economic stimulus package.

The keystone of Maxcy's plan to help jump start the stalled home building industry is suspending impact fees, which were launched 18 months ago to provide infrastructure funding caused by growth, as required by a state law.

Maxcy also wants to suspend other county fees – including those for building permits, landfill dumping of construction debris, site plan review, and building a driveway – to encourage home building.

Waiving the impact fee would cut $7,600 out of the costs to build a $200,000 home. Waiving the other fees would boost the savings to a total of $10,300, or just over 5 percent of the cost, of a $200,000 home.

At least one idea will be added by county administrator Carl Cool today. He will propose an advertising campaign designed to entice residents of Miami, Fort Lauderdale and other coastal cities to buy homes in Highlands County.

Other ideas that will be added to Maxcy's stimulus package include "fast tracking" building permits to cut the time between applying for a permit to breaking ground on a construction site. At 1:30 p.m.

Monday, Maxcy and several county officials met with people from building and engineering firms to discuss "fast tracking."

Over the past several weeks, since he announced he would propose a county economic stimulus plan, Maxcy said comments to him have been running "50/50 for and against" his ideas.

"Most of those negative comments I've gotten are from people who thought we're looking at a permanent fix, and thought we're talking about doing away with impact fees and landfill fees," Maxcy said.

While he hasn't yet placed any timelines on suspending impact and other fees, Maxcy said the fees would be dropped temporarily in the face of what he, unlike others, said is not just an economic slow-

down but a full blown national "recession."

"I'm not talking about doing away with impact and landfill fees, I'm talking about suspending them for a period of time," Maxcy said.

Maxcy said suspending construction-related fees won't help everybody, but it will "put people to work. And when you put people to work they spend money and that 'trickles down' and helps others out, too. People understand that when you put people to work you touch many lives."

Maxcy said many people have told him they want to see him "put the same energy" he has displayed for a "stimulus package" into cutting taxes when commissioners tackle their upcoming county budget.

"We're going to talk about cutting taxes and possible reductions in the millage rate, and that will touch many more lives than anything in this stimulus package," Maxcy said.

Something has to be done to stimulate the local economy, Maxcy said, "because a lot of folks are in some tough times right now."

Economic stimulus also must come from above Highlands County government, from the president and Congress as well as the governor and state Legislature, Maxcy said.

"Recession doesn't just hit a county, it hits the whole state and all the states and the whole nation," he said.

Not afraid to say the "R-word," Maxcy added, "A recession is what I feel like we're in."

Maxcy said he doesn't know how much a county stimulus plan can boost the local economy.

"What I do think," he said, "is that anything we can do as community leaders, within reason, to assist people at a time like this is something the commissioners should do."

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