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Builders to Stage Parking Lot Protest at County Building

Space-hogging tactic aims to persuade Polk Commission to lower impact fees.

By [Tom Palmer](#)
The Ledger

BARTOW | If you're planning a trip to Bartow this morning to conduct business at the courthouse or other county offices, be prepared for a parking crunch, courtesy of the Polk County Builders Association.

PCBA leaders sent out fliers this week urging members to fill the parking lot in front of the Neil Combee County Administration Building and beyond with local construction company vehicles.

Executive Director Scott Coulombe said the association expects 25 to 30 trucks from member companies to be parked as part of the effort.

The tactic is intended to draw attention to efforts to persuade county commissioners to cut most county impact fees in half. A public hearing on the proposal is scheduled for 1:30 this afternoon in the commission chambers.

The PCBA's efforts to commandeer parking spaces around county buildings drew criticism from other local activists.

Ron Tomlin, head of the Lakeland chapter of Florida Bipartisans, which opposes the impact fee cut, was the most vocal.

He said PCBA's tactic of taking the parking places makes it more difficult for members of the public opposed to the builders' position to comment on the proposal.

"At best, this is an arrogant power play that sets a precedent against the public's right to participate in our own government," said Al Whittle, one of Tomlin's colleagues.

Coulombe said the criticism is unfounded.

He said the builders' group is not interested in denying anyone access to the hearing.

"That's the furthest thing from our mind," he said.

"If people are inconvenienced for a day, sorry about that," Coulombe said.

Deputy County Manager Jim Freeman said county staffers began making plans for today's expected parking mess late Monday after they learned of PCBA's plans.

In addition to the impact fee hearing, there is a zoning appeal hearing involving a proposed landfill near Mulberry that is expected to draw a large crowd.

Freeman said county staffers will monitor the situation and will help employees and visitors find parking spaces.

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