

Lee County delays decision on impact fee moratorium

By SABINA BHASIN

Wednesday, February 13, 2013

LEE COUNTY —Despite nearly two hours of public comment on the proposed two-year moratorium on impact fees, the Lee County commissioners delayed voting on the issue for 30 days.

Commissioner Larry Kiker requested Tuesday that commissioners wait to vote on the issue until they can become "more educated and listen to more input about what the best decision is for the community."

The commissioners unanimously agreed to revisit the proposal at the March 4 Management and Planning meeting. They may bring it to a vote at the March 12 commission meeting.

Commissioner John Manning proposed the moratorium in January in an effort to help the building industry. He, along with those in the building industry, believe the moratorium will spur new growth in the area. Kiker and Commission Chairman Cecil Pendergrass have suggested they would be supportive of the moratorium.

Since the conversation about the impact fee break began, Lee County commissioners have received thousands of emails. Some people in the community feared their pay would be cut, or roads would remain unpaved or the moratorium would ultimately cost taxpayers.

Some came to the meeting and voiced similar concerns or support for the proposal.

"Lee County has grown because growth paid for growth," said Nick Batos, Chairman of the Estero Council of Community Leaders. "The building industry doesn't want to pay for the impact they're having on the community."

Batos said more than 600 Estero residents began an email campaign to prevent the moratorium from taking effect.

"It's our belief that this would be a major stimulus to our county and create jobs," said Stephanie Keyes, director of public policy for the Florida Association of Realtors, who supports the proposal.

Courtney Barnard, political representative from the same association as Keyes, said the commissioner need to consider the long-term effect impact fees can have on homes.

"Impact fees increase the cost of new construction," Barnard said. "They don't increase the value of that construction."

Impact fees are strictly imposed on new construction and used to cover the cost construction and expansion have on a community. The fees help pay for schools, roads, parks and emergency services. Typically builders cover the fee, passing the fee onto their clients. Impact fees do not affect salaries or lead to more taxes.

"We want to get clear, concise, specific information out there," Kiker said. "There's a lot of misinformation. We need to tell the story correctly."

The commissioners are considering implementing a mobility clause in lieu of an impact fee. Mobility fees are essentially the same thing, but the funds are permitted to be used for more than new construction. Also the moratorium would have a one-year sunset clause, which means, after the first year the board will meet again to discuss its success.



© 2013 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online