

Residents, officials argue against impact fee moratorium

By SABINA BHASIN

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A steady stream of residents and county officials urged Lee County commissioners on Tuesday to reconsider a proposed 2-year moratorium on impact fees.

More than two dozen people spoke during a 3-hour hearing on the proposal during Tuesday's commission meeting, with a majority opposing the moratorium. Bonita Springs city officials and Lee County School Board representatives said a moratorium could create a financial hardship.

School board representatives requested the school district be exempt from the moratorium. Currently the fire districts are exempt.

"Student enrollment is only going to increase," said Mary Fischer, chair of the Lee County School Board. "The moratorium will provide a negative ability to pay down debt ... and risk diminished services."

Impact fees are 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.

Commissioner John Manning is spearheading the issue in an effort to spur new growth. He believes temporarily eliminating the fees will increase construction in Lee County. Commissioners Larry Kiker and Cecil Pendergass have signaled that they are supportive of the proposal.

A handful of moratorium supporters at Tuesday's meeting said the proposal will create jobs.

Bonita Springs City Manager Carl Schwing spoke on behalf of city council and requested the city continue collecting from impact fees. Bonita Springs resident Ron Pure suggested the commissioners increase the impact fees.

"If Lee County is the paradise you believe it is, people will pay to play," he said.

At the Feb. 12 commission meeting, Assistant City Manager Pete Winton will provide the commissioners with information on alternative funding sources and methods to examine how a moratorium could impact job growth or affect funding for various county organizations.

"What I heard today is good for making a decision," Manning said.

