

Lessening the impact

By [Dave Pieklik](#)



Inverness City Manager Frank DiGiovanni wants the city to grow, and suggested at a budget workshop last week that county impact fees could present growing pains the city might want to avoid.

DiGiovanni suggested at the council's first 2008 budget workshop this past Thursday that it opt out of the county's plan, which goes into effect June 1. For a new 2,000-square-foot home, fees will increase from \$6,665 to \$9,314.

For a 3,000-square-foot fast food restaurant, fees increase from \$139,509 to \$207,684. The fees are designed to offset the costs of new roads, buildings and other facilities.

While DiGiovanni said he would like to see the infill of the city with new residents and businesses, he thought the fees might scare people off.

"If we stay in these county impact fees, that is going to choke the horse," he said, adding he didn't think they were in the city's best interest.

While DiGiovanni didn't recommend steering away from impact fees altogether, he urged the council to explore its own, less costly plan. Later on, he said impact fees are driving the decisions of "mom and pop" businesses that want to build new stores.

Some council members voiced concern during the workshop, and days later, feelings had not faded. Mayor Bob Plaisted said Monday that he's not for impact fees, and if possible, would like the city to back out of the county's plan.

Though impact fees are geared toward people moving into the area, Plaisted believes longtime residents will be just as impacted if they want to build a bigger home or relocate.

"Suddenly, if you want to better yourself, you're at a situation where it's going to cost you a heck of a lot more to do it," he said.

Plaisted, who rents several commercial and residential properties in the county, said the fees are impacting his business decisions, including building new apartments.

"We've got to look at what we can do to lure more people into our city, both residential and

commercial," he said.

Gospel Island resident Hilbert Staton, who served several years as the city's development services director, agrees with DiGiovanni's suggestion that the city create its own impact fee plan. However, he said the ramifications would need to be studied, including how much money the city would lose.

Like Plaisted, Staton said the city needs to attract more builders and people, and that high fees will make it difficult. He said the local economy could be hurt, and younger people could struggle to find affordable homes.

"I would think there should be other ways of getting the money that's needed," Staton said, adding he thinks local government should reduce its spending as a way to regain money.

Councilwoman Marti Consuegra said she believes impact fees are necessary because that's where the tax base comes from, not the schools or hospital.

"Impact fees are going to have to be paid, no matter what way you look at it," she said.

However, she did say she was in favor of lower fees.

Councilman Tom Johnson said the tax rate is already high enough, and favors looking at lower impact fees. That will bring more businesses and people into the city, he said.

Johnson added, "It will definitely increase our tax base."