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Manatee County plans to reduce road impact fees

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Published: Friday, April 3, 2009 at 1:00 a.m.

To assist home builders in reducing costs and possibly snagging more buyers, the County Commission intends to reduce impact fees for new roads by at least 25 percent.

The fees are charged on new construction to pay for its impact on growth, such as the need for new or expanded roads.

The current fees, which went into effect in 2007, are based on projections that the county would need \$1.6 billion worth of road construction during the next 30 years.

That estimate is no longer correct, County Administrator Ed Hunzeker told the commissioners Thursday.

Hunzeker said that road construction costs have dropped by roughly 25 percent because of the recession and that fees should be adjusted accordingly.

In addition, the 30-year time frame may no longer be accurate because of the economic downturn, Hunzeker said. "The 30-year plan needs to be revisited. It may be a 40-year plan."

Offset by reduced prices, a 25 percent cut in road fees should not cause the county to eliminate any transportation projects on its long-range plans, Hunzeker said. A bigger reduction, however, may require the county to strike projects, he said.

The commissioners asked Hunzeker to present updated data about how much the fees should be reduced on Tuesday, when they want to take action.

The Manatee School Board intends to waive its impact fees for a year.

The lower roads fee, plus the waived fee for schools, could roughly cut impact fees on a new home in the unincorporated county by half, Hunzeker said.

Currently, the county charges road impact fees of \$5,267 to \$8,421 for a home based on the number of bedrooms and whether it is a house, mobile home or multifamily dwelling.

Education impact fees range from \$605 to \$6,571 depending on the size and type of housing.

The county has yet to address impact fees for parks, public safety facilities or utilities.

Although they said they appreciate the proposed cut in road impact fees, several developers urged the commission to instead waive all impact fees for a year -- as the city of Bradenton has done.

Pat Neal of Neal Communities said he has cut his work force from 200 to 58.

"Right now, we need help," Neal said. He noted that impact fees account for 13 percent of the price of homes he now builds.

Developers said they are seeing an increase in potential customers, who are very sensitive about price and looking in other counties before making a decision.

"They're sitting on the fence," Britt Williams of Bruce Williams Homes said.

Cutting prices by a few thousand dollars could make the difference in whether a new home sells, he said

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