

Proposal to raise impact fees has some Martin County residents up in arms

By TCPalm Staff

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STUART — The Martin County School Board is still building new schools, providing work for the ailing the construction industry, but a proposal to raise school impact fees on new houses by about \$1,000 would hurt the industry, several local leaders said Tuesday.

The County Commission is set to review a proposal to increase school impact fees by about 22 percent on Feb. 12. But the commission put off a decision on increasing county impact fees, which range from \$6,692 to \$7,194 for a new house, until the summer.

The decline of the construction industry and differing opinions about impact fees were the major themes of a meeting Tuesday morning involving the Martin County School Board, the County Commission and the Stuart City Commission.

School impact fees are used to build the new schools that are needed to accommodate the students who move into newly built houses. The county's Impact Fee Review Committee has recommended that any impact fee increases go into effect on Oct. 1, the beginning of a new budget year.

Commissioner Lee Weberman said he doesn't want to raise impact fees because of the downturn in the construction industry.

"I spent the last three or four months talking to a lot of local builders. They're scared to death," Weberman said. "I personally am going to be very reluctant to raise any impact fees at this time for fear of actually putting people out of work."

But it is the school impact fees, which would rise to \$5,567 from \$4,555 on a house between 1,101 and 2,300 square feet, which were the subject of the most interest during the meeting of the county's top elected officials.

Scott Watson, president of the Indiantown-Western Martin County Chamber of Commerce, said the proposed school impact fees were inflated because the School Board is planning to build too many new facilities, including a new administrative headquarters.

"Now is not the time to add any additional burdens to our local and national economies, both of which are on the verge of implosion," Watson said. "Doing what is best for our children does not mean it's OK to tax our parents into the ground."

But Bill Summers, a government watchdog from Palm City, said if Martin County wants its schools to keep their high ratings, school impact fees should be raised to provide more money for new facilities.

"If there is any individual here or any group here that would advocate cutting the funds for our school system — I say, shame, shame on you," Summers said.

School Board members Sue Hershey and David "Doc" Anderson noted that the school district is still providing work for the construction industry with new schools being built in Palm City and Stuart.

"If it hadn't been for school construction, construction in this county would be dead — flat dead," Anderson said.

Proposed school impact fees on new houses: •

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House size/• Current/• Proposed•

801-1,100 square feet: • \$4,373.66/• \$5,355/• \$981.34•

1,101-2,300 square feet:• \$4,555.13• /• \$5,567/• \$1,011.87•

More than 2,301 square feet: • \$4,700.32• /• \$5,756/• \$1,055.68•

Martin County: www.martin.fl.us

City of Stuart: cityofstuart.com

Martin County schools: www.sbmcc.org



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