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**No fee deadline delay**

New impact levies go into effect June 1

For Charlotte County Commissioner [Tom D'Aprile](#), the choice was simple: Increase impact fees on new houses now or raise

property taxes for everyone later.

"This is a way of getting money so we would not have to increase" taxes, he said.

For veteran local builder Richard Sinclair, the result was equally simple.

"I should have brought a bugle to play taps," he said. "They just killed the American Dream for our children."

If only the decision and anticipated result were as simple as D'Aprile and Sinclair defined them.

Commissioners Tuesday unanimously approved three revisions to impact fees adopted in February, lowering the levy on new residential development by 30 cents to \$3.89 per square foot.

The fees are expected to generate \$92 million for roads alone over the next five years -- \$60 million more than the current fee schedule.

More importantly, they denied appeals to delay implementing the fees on June 1, despite uncertainties about administrative costs and allegations of flawed calculations.

Sinclair and Charlotte-Desoto Building Industry Association representatives said it would be prudent to push implementation back until at least July 1 when new state impact fee legislation goes into effect.

County officials argued the delay would be meaningless because nothing in the state law negates the county's new fee schedule and ordinance.

Commissioners concurred.

"I don't see what the advantage would be to hold off for another month," Commissioner [Sara Devos](#) said. "Eventually, it's going to be passed. I don't see the value in the delay."

County Budget Director Ray Sandrock said the only potential issue is the 2 percent administrative fee assessed by the county's ordinance.

Newly adopted state requirements limit administration costs to "actual costs," he said.

Sandrock said it will take about a year for the county to determine what the actual cost of administering impact fees will be.

The impact fee schedule adopted by the county 12 years ago -- and still in vogue until June 1 -- assesses a 3 percent administrative levy.

This prompted Sinclair to question why it will take a year to determine what "actual costs" would be.

"You've been collecting (administrative fees) for 12 years -- what are they?" he asked.

"That's insane," said Charlotte-Desoto Building Industry Association President Suzanne Graham of the year-long fee study. "We need to have those figures now."

Graham said the new fee schedule is riddled with "inconsistencies, flaws and typos."

"The figures are rushed; the facts are rushed," she said.

Charlotte-Desoto Building Industry Association Executive Officer Jon Bednerik said local builders are not opposed to higher impact fees, but don't want to see them inflated by inaccurate information.

Bednerik said commissioners are going with the "easy answer" by assessing impact fees rather than augmenting them with other revenues, including increased property taxes, bonds and levying a local-option real estate title transfer fee.

Consultant James Nichols, who authored the new impact fee ordinance, said the county has "maxed" its gas and sales taxing capacities, and is using property tax revenues for some infrastructure projects.

Nichols called the real estate title transfer fee a "great source" of revenue, but until the state legislature authorizes a local option, "it's not legally available to you."

Devos said the county's bonding capacity right now is limited to sales taxes. With local option sales tax revenues expiring next year, that source is limited, she said.

As distasteful as increasing fees are, "it's a fair and just approach," Commission Chairman Tom Moore said.

Sinclair didn't think so. "A lot of things are unfair, but this is not logical," he said.

But maybe it is, politically, Sinclair later conceded, noting that those most affected by the new fees are not here yet.

"They're up north," he said, "or still in college."

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