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Martin panel advises not hiking fee allotment for public buildings

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STUART — A Martin County advisory board recommended approving several increases to development fees charged to builders Friday but said the portion earmarked for constructing public buildings is too high.

Called impact fees, the assessments are added to the price of new homes to help pay public-services costs caused by growth.

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The Impact Fee Review Committee unanimously recommended that county commissioners leave unchanged the portion of fees devoted to the cost of public

buildings.

Commissioners already have voted to change the way they calculate the impact fees that go toward public buildings. The county's impact fee consultant, James Nicholas, estimates the builder of a 2,000-square-foot home would be forced to pay \$1,185, up from \$446.

The committee, whose recommendations are not binding, recommended instead to raise the impact fee to just \$606.

"I'm trying to keep the costs down and the impact fees down," said committee member Don Pickard.

Pickard, vice president of the Martin County Taxpayers Association has complained that the county's proposed increase in total impact fees from about \$8,000 to \$24,000 per house is too great and could hurt the building and real estate industries.

"The higher these impact fees get, the fewer new homes you'll have because people won't be able to afford them," said panel member Bob Kemper of the Treasure Coast Builders Association.



Martin County Economic Council Executive Director Tammy Simoneau said the county won't need as much public building space as it is forecasting.

Technology allows people to do more without coming into an office, she said.

"We can do just about anything from our desktops now," Simoneau said.

Committee member Robert Hendrickson suggested the county re-examine its projected levels of services, such as water, and the corresponding impact fees. .

Commissioners will vote on the proposed increases to total impact fees later this year or early next year.

They recently put off a vote related to school impact fees after getting flooded with complaints from business officials that the level-of-service calculations for schools were too high.

Not everyone at the committee meeting agreed with the recommendation to lower the fees for public buildings. Slow-growth activist Lloyd Brumfield said he thinks the real impact upon services from a family moving into Martin County into a new home is closer to \$36,000 than \$24,000.

"Development, business and industry has gotten a free ride," Brumfield said.

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