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### County should rethink need for new road-funding task force

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COMMENTARY

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Creating another "task force" to find money for road building and repair in Lake County is just a form of game-playing to "take us to the next election cycle," a former member of the county's Impact Fee Committee fussed after Sunday's column about a new task force.

Virgil Clark, who represented south Lake, said the committee on which he served covered all the possibilities and gathered the information that commissioners need.

What remains is simply for decisions to be made.

Instead, county commissioners appointed a new panel, the Transportation Alternative Funding Task Force, to examine whether to levy an extra 5 cents of tax on each gallon of gas. They gave members six months to consider the possibilities.

The new task force was formed after the county's public-works director warned in a presentation that impact-fee money was running out and roads still needed to be built. Some of the needs were caused solely by growth, and impact fees covered only about 60 percent of that cost.

"All the commissioners need to do is go back and read the recommendations, ask a few questions and decide what action to take," Clark wrote in an email.

The committee recommended temporary suspension of impact fees, which commissioners did, but Clark was part of the minority who disagreed. He noted that most of the committee members were from the building industry.

The county has limited ways to pay for roads — property, fuel and sales taxes as well as impact fees, special districts and cajoling developers to do their own projects. And some of those possibilities have to be eliminated. For example, much of the county's sales tax already is pledged to repay bonds.

"Suspending impact fees in the current downturn is not good for the taxpayers," Clark wrote. "The jobs created are offset by the glut created in the housing market. The only folks who benefit are those in the building industry, and the county folks who cater to them for political contributions."

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He urged commissioners to educate themselves and "rather than kick the can down the road, make a decision."

Clark is right. Commissioners should reconsider whether they really need yet another task force when the last one pretty much covered it all.

### **Tornado advice**

South Lake resident Sally Whitten watched the recent tornadoes in the South with a special sort of anxiety.

In a recent op-ed column in the Orlando Sentinel, she recounted her experience living in Michigan during the second-biggest tornado outbreak ever. Forty-seven twisters on April 11, 1965, killed 271 people in Michigan, Indiana and Ohio.

Now, as Florida heads into its storm season, Whitten's words of wisdom could help all of us cope if tragedy strikes.

Whitten and her late husband twice cowered in the basement while the storm raged above them. When they came out the second time, the entire house was gone and pieces were scattered down the road.

That's something few people ever get over completely.

Whitten sent some observations from the rebuilt home, where she spends summers:

"People who experience the kind of horror I did and the incredibly worse kind the folks did in the last few weeks lose a piece of the fullness of peace and tranquility in their lives that they cannot regain," she wrote.

"I love my homes and feel at peace and comfort in them, but I know it can all be gone by a power never dreamed of. Those words will bring comfort to no one, but it is a reality I am sure most of us survivors share."

But survivors also gain a thankfulness that sticks with them through their lives, Whitten said.

She offered a little advice:

"The survivors need to own their fears and terrors and realize that others, while trying to be supportive, really don't have a clue. They will never really see it all, feel it all as we do. So, when the next storm comes, survivors need to do what brings them the most comfort and disregard the looks, words and actions of others."

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