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Pasco looks at school impact fee for building

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PASCO -- Finding a solution to Pasco's overflowing schools may be the city's and school district's greatest challenge yet.

That's what Councilman Al Yenney said as the council discussed the district's request for a school impact fee Monday.

The district has struggled to keep up with student population growth that has increased by an average of 700 students per year over the past decade.

The district had almost 15,000 students at the beginning of the school year, and expects to reach almost 21,000 students in 2016.

The Pasco School District asked Pasco and Franklin County to consider requiring impact fees on new construction in the district that could help pay for temporary facilities needed to accommodate new students until new schools can be built.

The district has used up most of its taxing authority with the surge of growth, said Pasco City Manager Gary Crutchfield. That means it is faced with housing more students with a limited ability to build schools through voter-approved bonds.

The district suggested a \$6,012 fee for single family homes and \$5,572 for a multi-family dwelling.

Franklin County commissioners in December said that they thought the impact fee was a bad idea.



But Pasco council members weren't quite so quick to dismiss the proposal.

Councilman Saul Martinez said he thinks a lot of details need to be worked out, but the district, city and county can find something that will work.

Having a good school system is important in attracting industry, which Pasco is trying to do to broaden the city's tax base, said Councilwoman Rebecca Francik.

Martinez said he would hate to have someone decide not to build in Pasco because of schools being too full.

Pasco would need to carefully look at how an impact fee would be applied, Crutchfield said.

John Morgan, Pasco School District director of operations, said the district is looking at multiple options to solve the space crunch, including multi-track yearlong school.

"We don't have any more space," he said.

The district told the council in a Jan. 11 letter that it has outgrown the ability to provide schools for new development without requiring impact fees or mitigation.

Yenney said local officials also need to encourage state Legislators to change state law to allow school districts to cut out some of the "warm and fuzzy" building requirements such as green building and artwork.

George Dockstader, owner of Desert Hills Realty in Pasco, said adding an impact fee would increase home prices and could drive builders and first-time home buyers across the Columbia River.

Paul Roy of the Tri-Cities Association of Realtors asked the city to consider a broader way to pay for school facilities in the place of an impact fee, such as a voter-approved property tax levy.

Lack of school facilities is everyone's problem, he said. User impact fees are an end tax on a minority of users.

The council intends to ask the Pasco School Board and Franklin County commissioners to have a public meeting to discuss the issue within the next month.

If that isn't possible, Mayor Matt Watkins suggested the council create a committee to have further discussions with the district and county.

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