



## SCHOOLS

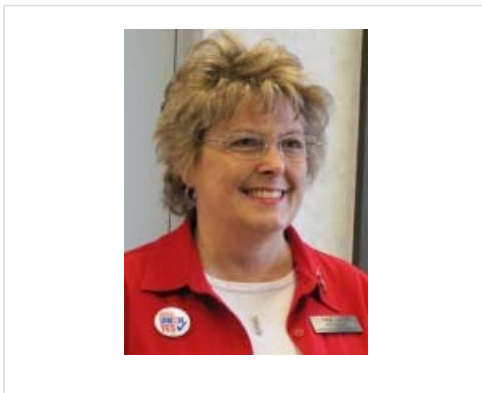
## Pasco Schools Stand To Lose More Funding

A proposed elimination of impact fees could cut millions more from the budget.

By [Sherri Lonon](#) 12:00pm

Already wrangling with an estimated \$60 million budget cut for next year, [Pasco County Board](http://www.pasco.k12.fl.us/school_board/) members must now face the possibility of seeing their dollars dwindle even more.

A proposal to reduce or eliminate school impact fees is on the drawing board with the Pasco County Commission. The move, county officials say, is designed to foster growth and bring jobs to the area. Impact fees are charged to developers to help offset the costs of services new developments require. In the case of school impact fees, the county currently charges just under \$5,000 for each new single-family home.



County Commissioner Pat Mulieri said a determination of how much school impact fees might be cut hasn't been made just yet.

"The amount depends on whether we eliminate school impact fees or reduce them to half the amount," she wrote in an e-mail. "We need to meet with the school board."

That proposed meeting was discussed by school board members during a special session held March 8. While school board members didn't get into specifics about the possible elimination of impact fees, they did set a March 21 workshop date to discuss the county's proposal in depth. They also asked staff to provide them with answers to a myriad of questions.

At the request of board members Cynthia Armstrong, Joanne Hurley and Steve Lukart, school district staff will work with county officials to gather information about such things as how much has been collected in impact fees since the program's inception and how much money the county charges in administration fees.

In the meantime, the possible loss of more revenue is not something the district or the United School Employees of Pasco are taking in stride.

"We can't imagine losing any source of revenue right now," said Lynne Webb, who serves as the USEP's president. "I can't see putting the careers and success of home builders over the careers and success of our students."

According to school district spokeswoman Summer Romagnoli, the loss of impact fee funding could be a difficult cut to face.

"We have concerns about any proposal that would cut another revenue source for the district," she wrote in an e-mail about impending budget cuts.

Romagnoli said the district is facing the loss of \$60 million next year due to a combination of federal stimulus dollars going away and possible state funding cuts. The federal stimulus money represents \$47 million of the loss.

Impact fees, Romagnoli said, are crucial for helping the school district pay its debt on schools that were built to meet the needs of recent growth.

She wrote, "\$276.6 million was bonded specifically for the purpose of building 11 new schools necessitated by growth since the impact fee has been established. The annual debt service payment for these new schools is \$16.8 million. The total capital cost for these 11 new schools is \$301,284,186 (including land and construction)."

State law enables the school district to use a combination of capital funding and impact fees to pay bond debts, she said. "Impact fee collections to date have only totaled \$98 million (or 32 percent of the entire cost of opening these schools)."

If impact fees are eliminated, the district will have to make some of its \$16.8 million annual debt payments out of the general fund, she added. This money is traditionally used to pay salaries and program expenses.

"This will lead to more lay-offs, salary cuts or program cuts in our operating budget," she wrote.

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A joint New Port Richey county officials board presentation to Pasco's incorporated cities will be scheduled after the school board meets March 21 at 1:30 p.m.

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