

Peter O'Bryan: Indian River County Commission tries to balance economy, equity

By TCPalm Staff

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Larry Reisman's column of Aug. 19 once again exemplifies the Press Journal motto, "Only report half the story and then screw up the half you report."

About the only thing Larry got correct was, yes, the County Commission did vote to waive five of our nine impact fees for a six-month period to help spur economic activity in the county. During the public hearing on this action, the board was unanimous in that we did not believe that residential construction needed any stimulus due to the record inventory and vacancies, and that the waiver was targeting commercial and industrial projects to create more jobs.

However, the county attorney gave the opinion that any impact-fee reduction would have to apply to all building permits, both residential and commercial. However, we did structure the waiver so that residential only received an approximate 10 percent reduction, while most commercial and industrial projects received a 35 percent break or larger.

Larry also fails to report that 16 commercial projects did pull permits during the four-month waiver period to date (waiver was effective April 1). These projects included office buildings, aquaculture facilities, churches, a bank, a clubhouse and a restaurant. The total value of the new projects was \$8.6 million. Arguably not a real big number, but certainly better than zero.

While I cannot speak for the entire board, I believe we are very cognizant and committed to diversifying our economy, but that kind of change takes time and patience. The impact-fee waiver was always designed as a short term action to try to generate some activity so folks could put food on the table.

We realize that the impact-fee waiver is not the long-term solution. One way to attract diversified employment centers is to make sure our county reflects a "business friendly" climate, a county that is sensitive to the needs of the business community. I firmly believe that a short-term waiver of impact fees during this economic crisis does reflect a sensitivity to the needs of the business community, and thus, is a step forward to a more diversified economy.

I welcome comments, which can be mailed to the county administration building or my

e-mail at pobryan@ircgov.com.

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