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Laurence Reisman: County's new scheme a slap at the young

By **Laurence Reisman**
 editorial page editor
 May 16, 2005



Dear Rhett and Britt:

On Tuesday, the elected leaders of Indian River County are expected to tack on \$7,000 extra to the price of a new home.

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They think newcomers to the county should pay these "impact fees." They think it's necessary because these newcomers will create a need for new government services: jails, roads, fire stations, parks and schools.

They think, much like impact-fee spin-doctors in Broward and other overdeveloped counties, that the fees will help manage growth.

Simply put, our leaders have been railroaded by consultants and by local gatekeepers, people who moved here and now don't want anyone else entering their little piece of paradise.

We were snowballed by county leaders who sold us on an additional 1 percent sales tax, which voters passed in November 2002, to pay for capital projects. When we passed the referendum, little did we know that the impact fee increases would be so draconian.

When you're old enough to fully appreciate this letter, about the time you graduate from college and might want to return here, I hope you'll find that your dad, who took the time to write this, was simply a curmudgeon. But unless county leaders start representing all people, not just the gatekeepers, you, as an Indian River County native, will be locked out.

First, there are few places here to work and earn a decent living. While St. Lucie County

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has major plans for a research center, your own leaders got all excited about landing a CVS distribution center. Yes, it will be a nice addition, but we need jobs for young professionals, too.

Second, the impact fees will only serve to drive up the cost of *all* housing. That will make it difficult for you to own a home, and if you buy a new one, you'll have to pay those impact fees even though you've been a resident for years.

Already, few people in town can afford to buy the average home, about \$225,000. Thankfully, many of us bought our pieces of paradise in the mid-1990s or earlier. Most of us can't afford to move across town because of escalating taxes and property values.

By the time you are ready to graduate, the only place you'll be able to afford to live in this region is in your old bedroom.

In other words, this county has invested time and money to educate our young, but they have to go elsewhere to work because there are few opportunities here. Maybe you will be able to come back 10 years after school, after you've flipped your first two houses in that fast-growing area of northern Louisiana.

I apologize for being cynical, but I, like the commissioners who are voting for the impact fee increases, remember the days when this community welcomed newcomers; when we all shared the burden — with tourists who helped to pay higher sales taxes — to build a new jail, Indian River Boulevard and a host of other projects.

There was a time when we worked together to solve problems, and when common sense, not uncreative, out-of-town consultants, made things work. Perhaps life has gotten too complicated to handle ourselves. Maybe common sense has died and bureaucracy has gotten out of hand.

The gatekeepers, many of whom are retired and relocated from elsewhere, want a nice place to live. Others, though, are more skeptical. They say the gatekeepers want to keep their own taxes down and, by limiting growth and increasing impact fees, want to drive all sorts of home prices higher, thus increasing the values of their own nest eggs.

Whatever the reason, you, my sons, will be affected.

I will continue to advocate for fairness, prudence, economic development, controlled growth, reasonably priced housing, common sense and anything else that will protect the quality of life we all enjoy.

That quality of life was rooted in the spirit of the pioneers who founded this community and who welcomed outside influences. This merging of cultures and spirit is what led to what we have today.

I hope you see something similarly special in this community in 2015 or 2020. If you do, it's because our leaders — against all odds — somehow found a way to keep housing affordable while keeping our quality of life high.

That's a tall order, and one that seems to be impossible when implementing high impact fees.

Love, Dad

Reisman, who writes a periodic column, can be reached at (Laurence.reisman@scripps.com).

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