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Road impact fee hike delayed

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With a drastic decline in the number of building permits issued this year, the Sarasota County Commission on Wednesday voted to postpone an additional 32 percent increase in road impact fees scheduled to begin in June.

"We are at the lowest permit levels in a decade in Sarasota County," County Administrator Jim Ley said. "Year to date, the number of permits issued by Sarasota County has decreased 59 percent from a year ago and 75 percent from two years ago."

Florida's economy is built on the "wobbling legs" of the tourism, agriculture and construction industries, and Sarasota County is feeling the pains of an extremely nervous real estate market, Ley told commissioners Wednesday.

"It is probably the worst housing recession in the state's history," he said. "And the economy is not expected to improve in the short term."

Earlier this year, Sarasota County commissioners voted to increase the road impact fees on a single-family home to \$5,774 per dwelling, up from a \$2,874 rate established in 2005.

"That was a 101 percent increase," said Clarke Davis, the county's transportation planning manager.

But the new rate was only 68 percent of the proposed increase approved this past summer. The commission had agreed to implement the remaining 32 percent increase by next summer, Davis said. That would make the road impact fee about \$7,000 per home.

Considering the increasingly struggling economy, Commissioner Shannon Staub said the county should postpone the remaining 32 percent rate hike until June 2009.

"The 32 percent is not a great deal of money, but it is something," Staub said, adding the county needs to show developers it understands there has been a significant downturn in the real estate market.

Even though development throughout the county has slowed, Commissioner Joe Barbetta pointed out there is still a great need for the impact fees to fund road projects.

"That 32 percent is about \$1,200 to \$1,500" per single-family home, Barbetta said.

Commissioners also agreed to decrease the impact fee for hotels and motels, from the current \$2,979 per room to \$2,052 per room, based on the staff's recommendation.

"Hotels/motels did have a rate of \$1,169 in 2005. It was raised to \$2,979 per room this summer. That was a 154 percent increase," Davis said, adding that Manatee County charges approximately \$3,000 per room.

In addition, commissioners decided to delete impact fees for movie theaters because they are usually built in shopping centers. Many developers, including Benderson Development, which is building the mixed-used project called University Town Center near Interstate 75 and University Parkway, were concerned they would have to pay both the theater and shopping center impact fees, Davis said.

Davis recommended deleting the movie theater rate, which would have charged developers \$26 per square foot, and charge theater developers the shopping center rate of about \$11 per square foot.

Thaxton said giving developers of hotels and shopping centers a break was justified.

"Right now, the arts and tourism is what's carrying this county," he said.

Stacey Eidson, Herald reporter, can be reached at 708-7908. not sure where is will jump but you can go ahead with the hede

Sarasota postpones road impact fee increase

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