



School Board urges Hernando County commissioners to reinstate impact fees

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BROOKSVILLE — Hernando School Board members made their pitch to the County Commission on Tuesday, saying the reinstatement of impact fees for educational facilities would be an investment in the future.

But by the end of the rare workshop of the two boards, it was clear that each was divided in their views of what should happen before the moratorium on all impact fees is set to end Nov. 15.

By a 3-2 majority, the School Board sought to let that deadline pass without action so that the 2005 educational facilities impact fee of \$4,200 per single-family home would be reinstated.

School officials explained the current capacity of schools and how the return of building activity in the county would affect future school construction needs.

"Schools are going to have to be built, and somebody's got to pay," said School Board member Dianne Bonfield. If impact fees don't pay for the needed new facilities, then current residents will, she said.

"We all make investments, and these are good ones," Bonfield said.

Board members Matthew Foreman and John Sweeney were opposed to going back to the old fees. They cited concerns about whether the school district could legally defend those fees since property values and costs have changed so dramatically since 2005.

Impact fees are paid by new businesses and residents and are designed to cover the cost of infrastructure needed to accommodate a growing community — from public buildings to new schools.

The County Commission in 2009 halved the impact fees for schools, roads, libraries and parks. They maintained that reduction for another year, then in 2011 abolished all fees until Nov. 15 of this year, in hopes of stimulating the economy.

County staffers have prepared updated fees that could be put in place for a number of the impact fee categories, but are still awaiting a new transportation impact fee report, which a consultant is currently preparing.

One option the county staff has offered is to delay the end of the moratorium until February, possibly leaving enough time for the completion of the transportation fee study.

School district officials have not yet ordered a study to determine the proper level for school impact fees. On Tuesday, superintendent Bryan Blavatt told the commission that the School Board was hoping the study, which carries a price tag of between \$40,000 and \$60,000, could be financed through the 3 percent administration fee the county keeps for collecting school impact fees.

County commissioners seemed willing to work something out, but left the details with their staff.

The commissioners on Tuesday were also divided on what to do next.

Commission Chairman Wayne Dukes and Commissioner Dave Russell were leaning toward a delay in lifting the moratorium so they could have the final study results in hand before making a decision.

Commissioner John Druzbeck said he supported doing something for the schools, even if they had to go with a fee lower than the 2005 amount to make the fee easier to defend in case of a challenge. He suggested \$2,400 per single-family home.

A former School Board member, Druzbeck said he saw the needs.

"I sat on that board when there were more portable classrooms than brick-and-mortar classrooms," he said.

He noted that the meeting when a vote must be taken, Nov. 13, will be his last meeting as a commissioner. The same is true for Commissioner Jeff Stabins, who was also interested in Druzbeck's suggestion.

Stabins said he wanted to help out the schools.

"We've let all our facilities go to hell," he said.

Ultimately, the commissioners charged their staff with preparing a new impact fee ordinance for consideration at that meeting.

It will offer multiple options.

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