



February 27, 2009

Seeking growth, county waives impact fees

Commissioners hope commercial impact relief will boost work

*BY JIM WAYMER
FLORIDA TODAY*

The Brevard County Commission decided Thursday to put a one- to two-year moratorium on commercial impact fees, effective Sunday.

Commissioners hope the temporary moratorium can spur new commercial construction and jobs. All five voted for it.

"It will put people back to work," said Commissioner Andy Anderson, who first pitched the idea during the board's Dec. 2 meeting.

Commissioners plan to vote on a new ordinance at their next meeting Thursday to spell out the details of the moratorium, such as when it would sunset.

The county puts impact fees on new commercial development for transportation, fire-rescue, emergency medical and corrections.

"We implemented these impact fees to stifle growth," said commissioner Trudie Infantini, who campaigned for office on an anti-impact-fee platform. She has said businesses already bear a disproportionate property tax burden.

But Commissioner Chuck Nelson said the county should tread carefully because it relies on the fees for road improvements, such as the Viera Boulevard flyover and Wickham Road widening. The county needs to know more about potential lost revenue, he said.

"I think it's critical that we understand what the ramifications are," Nelson said. "Could you imagine The Avenue without impact fees?"

Road projects that could be affected include the widening of Barnes Boulevard; a realignment project at Wickham Road, NASA Boulevard and Ellis Road; six intersection improvements along Grissom Road; several sidewalk projects; and several feasibility and traffic studies.

Brevard took in about \$5.8 million in transportation impact fees in fiscal year 2008. The county had projected \$6.5 million in fiscal year 2009.

Local developers applauded the moratorium. They described to commissioners recent commercial projects killed, or nearly killed, by the fees.

"I think the present structure of impact fees is totally unjust," said Jim Garrison, a contractor with Garrison Construction Design Build Inc. in Titusville.

He said the fees make no distinction between projects that truly increase impact to roads and those that don't.

Removing the fees will create a positive ripple effect throughout the local economy, said Luke Miorelli, a president of M.E. Construction Inc., a contractor in West Melbourne.

"It's an added cost that you just didn't get anything for."

Contact Waymer at 242-3663 or jwaymer@floridatoday.com.
