

# County will skip study on impact fees before voting

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INVERNESS - A divided County Commission decided Tuesday to move ahead with voting on impact fees this week without conducting a study on the economic effects of increasing them.

Economic Development Council executive director Brett Wattles told commissioners that a \$40,000 to \$50,000 economic study was necessary. He said the study, conducted by an outside consultant and funded with occupational license money, would give commissioners a clear understanding of the implications of impact fees in Citrus.

"If we kill the growth ... it's a really tricky situation for this economy," Wattles said.

Commission Chairman Dennis Damato and Commissioner John Thrumston said they agreed.

But Commissioners Vicki Phillips, Joyce Valentino and Gary Bartell said deciding to start a new study this week would be premature. They voted against the EDC's recommendation.

Bartell said commissioners need to develop clear criteria for a future economic study that looks beyond impact fees at all of the ways the county funds growth.

"When you hire a consultant ... when you tell them what you want and you plug in the criteria, that's what you're going to get back," he said.

Thrumston said an economic study should be a vital part of the commission's impact fee decisions. Damato agreed.

"Any reasonable business decision that affects the lives of 140,000 people should have the economic analysis in place before being made," he said.

During the meeting's public comment period, several high-profile builders urged commissioners to conduct an economic study.

"I would think you'd want all the information at hand before you make such an important decision," said Jim Crosley of Pine Ridge.

Randy Clark of Clark Construction in Crystal River said commissioners have paid too much attention to a county consultant's study without giving credibility to an impact fee study funded by the builders association.

"Just because it's a study the County Commission has paid for doesn't mean that it's gospel," he said.

But others said an economic study is a stall tactic and a waste of government money.

"We believe that any study requested by the EDC will come to a foregone conclusion," Jim McIntosh of Lecanto said. "It will favor the building industry at the expense of homeowners."

Commissioners will have a hearing on proposed impact fee increases at 9 a.m. Thursday at the Citrus County Courthouse, 110 N Apopka Ave.

In other news at Tuesday's meeting:

- Harold Seckinger of Homosassa criticized Danella Construction's work in building a sewer main on Taylor Terrace near Halls River Road.

The main "cannot be considered dependable, and failure is almost certain," Seckinger said.

Commissioners voted unanimously to allow homes connecting to that main to keep septic tanks in place for a year after connecting, as a backup plan.

- When commissioners hold their goal-setting workshop this year, they will not hire an outside facilitator to help.

County Administrator June Fisher originally suggested bringing in a facilitator. But commissioners said Tuesday that could be costly, with questionable results.

Damato said he initially supported the idea but was turned off by the cost estimates of more than \$5,000.

Commissioners said they were confident that Fisher could lead them through this year's workshop.

"This is your chance to shine," Damato said.

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