

## Impact fee nails future homes

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BUNNELL -- Anyone who builds a home in Flagler County after Feb. 7 must pay a school impact fee that local leaders say is needed to accommodate the district's growth.

At the urging of district and industry officials, the County Commission voted unanimously Monday to impose a \$3,600 fee on a house, \$1,056 on a mobile home and \$931 on an apartment.

Developers and home builders -- the staunchest critics of impact fees -- acknowledged the need to fund new schools.

"We can support this," said Charles Rinek, president of the Flagler County/Palm Coast Home Builders Association.

Rinek said he still questions the methodology used to determine the fees, but he's pleased the fees will be open for review later.

Low-income housing will be exempt, as will anyone building a home in a retirement community that bars children from living there, said David Haas, the county administrator.

The \$3,600 fee for a new house surpasses the new school impact fee proposed in Volusia County.

In Volusia County, school officials had planned to raise the district's impact fee in February to \$3,165 from \$1,139, however they decided last month to put off the increase to further study the idea. Volusia's fee is the same for new houses, apartments and mobile homes.

Flagler County must play catch-up for the years it neglected to institute impact fees, Commissioner George Hanns said.

"Growth has to pay for itself," Hanns said.

Impact fees shift some of the school-construction costs onto newcomers bringing children to the district, Hanns said. Otherwise, the burden falls on existing homeowners.

Commissioner Blair Kanbar agreed.

"You would be doubly taxed if we did not pay those impact fees," Kanbar told local residents in the audience.

Haas noted that home builders in Osceola County are suing their county over school impact fees, claiming the methodology is flawed. He heard rumblings in Flagler about possible legal action over the fees' methodology, but those threats have faded, Haas said.

County attorney Carl Kern said the impact fees are "legally defensible."

"I think the nuts and bolts of this are good," Kern said.

School board member Colleen Conklin said the fees will help the district better serve families.

"I am relieved that it was imparted as a win/win for both sides, and that it was received without as much contention as it had been in the past," Conklin said.

The fees will go into effect in 60 days.

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