

## County studies impact fee plan

By Mike Bowdoin

The Levy County Commission is getting cranked up on its long-dormant plans to study the possible imposition of impact fees on new construction in the county.

The board approved a motion by County Commissioner Sammy Yearty Nov. 16 to begin studies of possible impact fees to help fund county services in the areas of road building, emergency medical help, parks and recreation, and fire protection.

Commissioners have kicked the idea of impact fees around for about five years now, starting with a partial study on the subject by a University of Florida professor in 1999. Clerk of Court Danny Shipp presented the board with a study two years ago showing how population growth is having a significant impact on the cost of county services, but a push for actual implementation of impact fees did not develop until recently.

On Tuesday County Coordinator Fred Moody said that the county is eligible for \$5,000 in grant funding from a program designed to help small Florida counties.

He said County Planner Kathy Winburn has looked into the matter and recommends that roads, EMS, parks, fire services and solid waste disposal are areas where the county could legitimately claim a nexus between growth and an impact on service costs.

Moody said he had contacted the Nabors and Giblin law firm, which drew up the new special assessment ordinance for the county recently, but they cannot give a quote for studying and writing an impact fee ordinance until they know the full scope of the job.

Commission Chairman Lilly Rooks said, "I personally want to see this studied immediately, let's get the ball rolling," and directed Moody to move forward in preparing a proposal.

However, Yearty said it is pretty clear which services the county needs help with that are eligible for impact fee funding, and he recommended voting to approve the study then.

"It seems to me that we could be ahead of the game, and just use some common sense," Yearty said.

County Commissioner Danny Stevens said he would also like to include solid waste disposal in the study, but Yearty noted that the landfill fund is in healthy shape and it could be added to the list at a later date if the need ever should arise.

In other business Tuesday, the board:

n Approved a new contract with the county workers' union for the fiscal year 2004-2005 that provides for a three-percent increase in pay for employees. As a concession to the board in lean financial times, the union agreed to one-year freeze on additional performance-based bonuses that were approved last year.

n Approved acceptance of a state courthouse facility improvement grant of \$175,000. Jan Chesser of the court administrator's office explained that the funds are tentatively planned for creating a fiber-optic link between the courthouse and the county jail, improving the courthouse entrance for disabled

citizens and possibly building a multi-purpose hearing room that could be used by the board as well as the court system.

n Approved a disbursement of \$7,000 in bed tax funds to create a Levy County tourism information center in the Cedar Key State Museum. The board also approved Williston City Councilman Jerry Robinson as a replacement for suspended councilman Justin Landon on the Tourism Development Council.

n Heard a report from Suwannee River Water Management District Hydrologist Tom Mirti, who said the rainfall received in the Chiefland area during the two days of Tropical Storm Frances had been "a hundred-year event" in which the area got 13.68 inches of rain in the two days.