

Builders: Impact fee study flawed

By Sian Perry, News-Leader

A study calling for school impact fees in Nassau County is flawed and "skewed against new development," a builders' group is charging.

According to its analysis of the study by Fishkind and Associates of Orlando - commissioned by the Nassau County School Board in December 2003 - a school impact fee on new development may not be justified.

The group, the Northeast Florida Builders Association, argues ad valorem taxes and other existing revenue sources will be sufficient to fund new schools as the county grows, at least through 2013.

Fishkind has predicted at least a \$25 million shortfall over its 27-year forecast.

In its analysis the builders' association calls this and other of the study's data into question. The Fishkind recommendation "that the county begin implementing impact fees now in order to maintain capacity in light of the projected \$25 million is based on many errors and unfounded assumptions," it states.

Asked whether the Northeast Florida Builders Association is pushing for no school impact

fee, associate director Daniel Davis said, "The association is looking forward to working with the school board and county

commission to help the county commission make a good decision. . . . a good solid decision based on good solid numbers."

He added, "We just want to make sure we are all on the same page."

The builders' analysis was prepared by Fowler White Bogs Banker P.A. of Tallahassee.

It argues that in other Florida counties, impact fees must be used for their intended purpose within six years of their collection, and that the school board will have a surplus of funds until at least 2013, negating the need for a school impact fee on new development, at least for now.

It also charges that new homeowners could end up paying twice for new schools - once with their ad valorem tax dollars and again through an impact fee.

The builders' association also questions the study's comparisons to some counties in Florida but not others.

"Fishkind calculates the total cost per student station by dwelling type using data from Lake County. . . . The demographics and growth rate of the two counties are not comparable, and the data needed to make valid conclusions about Nassau County are not difficult to assemble," the builders' analysis reads.

It concludes, "No attempt has been made to determine the true extent to which new residential development will create a need for new school facilities and to develop a formula that will assess that new development no more than its pro rata share for those facilities."

Schools Superintendent John Ruis said the criticism wasn't unexpected.

"We knew they were going to look at it with a critical eye," he said. "We anticipated that. That's OK."

The school board will hold a workshop on the issue at 4 p.m. Thursday at the district office, 1201 Atlantic Ave. A joint meeting between the school board and county commission is planned for 4 p.m. Jan. 27, also at the district office.

Following that meeting, school board officials had planned to draft a resolution for a school impact fee ordinance.

County commissioners would have to approve that ordinance following more public hearings.

sperry@fbnewsleader.com

Fishkind recommends

In December 2003 the Nassau County School Board commissioned a study on growth and school impact fees by Fishkind and Associates of Orlando at a cost of \$35,000.

The consultant's resulting report includes a student enrollment forecast, a fiscal impact model and proposed school impact fees.

Fishkind has predicted the school board will face at least a \$25 million shortfall over its 27-year forecast if it continues to rely solely on ad valorem taxes to fund new schools and has recommended a range of impact fees on new construction to help cover the cost.

A flat impact fee of \$3,726, levied on all new construction regardless of dwelling type, would generate \$94.7 million over the next 30 years, Stanley Geberer, the study's author, reports.

The other option is to levy impact fees based on dwelling type, charging \$4,212 for a single family home, \$3,834 for a multi-family unit and \$2,591 for a mobile home.

That would generate more money - \$96.9 million over the next 30 years, according to Geberer's estimates.

other counties levy - Single-family fee

Broward \$1,719

Citrus \$636

Collier \$1,778

Hernando \$2,406

Hillsborough \$1,250

Lake \$4,142

Lee \$2,232

Martin \$1,006

Miami-Dade \$612

Orange \$2,828

Osceola \$9,850

Palm Beach \$1,625

Pasco \$1,694

Seminole 1,384

St. Johns \$900

St. Lucie \$800

Volusia \$1,139