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## Walton Weighs Impact Fees

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**Florida** - The cost of development in Walton County could go up if officials approve a plan to charge impact fees on new construction. The fees will pay for additional fire stations and equipment for Walton County Fire Rescue. The Walton County Commission is considering charging \$269.14 per residential unit and \$2.16 per square foot for commercial development.

"It's a way to pass on the expenses to the growing areas that are causing the increases in the demand for services," said county Fire Rescue Manager Eddie Rivers.

It's unclear when the county may adopt the impact fees.

Commissioner Larry Jones said he wants to make sure the county has a real need for the fees and that those fees don't deter developers from building.

"There is that potential, and that's one of the things we have to look at," Jones said.

The county formed its fire rescue two years ago to consolidate several independent fire districts north of Choctawhatchee Bay.

The agency provides fire coverage to all unincorporated areas of the county except South Walton, Liberty and Argyle, which are covered by independent fire districts.

Walton County Fire Rescue collects taxes from homes and businesses in its coverage area to run its daily operations, but that funding is not enough to pay for new stations and equipment, Rivers said.

"That's very minimal," he said.

It would cost about \$1.5 million to build a new fire station. Each fire engine costs about \$350,000 and each ladder truck runs from \$750,000 to \$1 million, Rivers said.

There are already places where the impact fees could be put to use.

The county needs a new fire station in Red Bay to replace a temporary building there, Rivers said.

The growing Black Creek area southeast of Freeport also needs a fire station, he said. There is not one there now, and the nearest fire station is several miles away in Freeport.

The Mossy Head community northwest of DeFuniak Springs is also poised for residential and industrial growth and will likely need a new fire station within the next five years, Rivers said.

Walton County Fire Rescue currently relies on property tax revenue to pay for equipment and construction, Rivers said.

Impact fees will take some of the burden off existing residents, Rivers said.

"It keeps residents from having to fund the growth," he said.

Written by Florida Daily News

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