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New impact fees proposed; County board studies implementation of new charges

By Ideybis Gonzalez, Clewiston News

HENDRY COUNTY — Hendry County officials may implementing new fees to take advantage of new development countywide.

The hope is that entities coming into the county will pay impact fees that will take the need for funding capital facility improvements into account. The emergence of such new developments must be accounted for by a proportionate growth in municipal services and facilities to meet the needs of the new areas.

Following in line with growth projections, the board of county commissioners hired Dr. James Nicholas to prepare a budget analysis focused on additional impact fees. The fees will include charges for parks and recreation, law enforcement, public libraries, fire/rescue protection and public buildings.

Dr. Nicholas is a planning and development director specializing in such reviews.

To put the impact fees in perspective, the county's consultant studied impact fees imposed in 39 other counties in Florida, and provided an average. As an example, the average impact fee for parks was calculated to be \$904, while Hendry County's proposed fees stand at \$590. Other fees follow in line: the library impact fee average is \$214, the proposed county fee is \$44; law/jail impact fee averages \$334, Hendry County proposes \$254.

The public building fee around the state averages \$447, while Hendry County would like to charge \$601. The 39-county average for fire and EMS is \$378; Hendry County proposes to charge \$494.

The total average for the counties is \$7,590, compared to Hendry County's \$1,984 proposed figure. It is important to note, however, that some large counties have considerable road and transportation and school impact fees that Hendry County is not suggesting locally.

Dr. Nicholas also provided commissioners with a review of what neighboring counties charge and Hendry County's proposed impact fees ranked among the lowest, approximately \$1,000 more than Glades and Charlotte counties, but far below Lee, DeSoto and Collier counties.

Dr. Nicholas himself said the figures place Hendry County's proposed



fees at mid-average in comparison to other counties in Florida. Dr. Nicholas worked with department heads and other officials to come up with the actual fees.

The report was initially submitted to county commissioners last August, but was brought before the board again after commissioners posed questions and offered minor adjustments.

Commissioners are expected to review the document one last time before voting to make a final decision during its first meeting in July.

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