

Impact fee strategy changes

Commissioners vote against hiring consultant, will work to alter law

By **Preston Sparks** | *Columbia County Bureau Chief*

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Columbia County commissioners voted Tuesday night not to approve \$61,000 for a consultant who would have helped establish an impact fee ordinance for the county's consideration.

Commissioners agreed to drop the idea of an impact fee as it is currently established under state law.

Instead, they will focus on introducing new legislation to allow the fee's funds to be spent on schools and also ease some of the fee's other regulations.

"We just thought it would not be the best use of that consultant money," Columbia County Commission Chairman Ron Cross said after the meeting in Appling.

Impact fees are charged on new development, residential and commercial, to help offset future growth costs.

Currently, money from the fee cannot be used for schools, which Mr. Cross said is where the money could be useful in Columbia County.

In the past, developers have argued against the fee, saying that new development pays for itself and that an added fee would be passed on from them to the home buyer.

In April, commissioners agreed to set aside \$50,000 for an impact fee study in this year's fiscal budget. However, when it came time to award the study to the firm TischlerBise at \$61,000, commissioners changed their minds.

By late fall, Mr. Cross said, commissioners will focus on approaching the area's legislative delegation about changing the impact fee law.

In other action Tuesday night, commissioners approved an easement for a sewer line through the county's closed landfill to a new high school being planned on Chamblin Road. The goal is to open the high school in 2009.

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