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Panel Approves Impact Fee Cut Ordinance

By **TOM PALMER**

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PRO VS. CON

SUPPORTED: Wilkinson, Myers, English, Johnson

OPPOSED: Reed

BARTOW | Impact fee cuts for economic development and work force housing were approved 4-1 Wednesday following a sharp debate by members of the Polk County Commission.

The fee cuts, which could result in the loss of more than a \$1 million in impact fee revenue, were proposed earlier this year by county economic developments officials and members of the local development community.

Commissioner Jean Reed, who opposed the cuts, questioned how the county could afford to lose money with the continued infrastructure shortage.

Commissioner Jack Myers, a critic of impact fees in general, said the loss of the revenue is small, compared with the property tax revenue the new construction will generate.

Myers blamed the county's relatively high impact fees for a slowdown in new construction.

"Houses are down; impact fees are down," he said. "We've collected half of the impact fees we've budgeted."

But Reed questioned the rationale for the cuts.

"Are we doing this for the real estate market and the building industry, or for people who need homes?" she asked.

Resident David Hupp said he supported the impact-fee cuts for economic development but questioned the cuts for work force housing, arguing the lost revenue will have to be made up by the taxpayers.

"This is a slippery slope issue," Hupp said. "It makes too many concessions."

Scott Coulumbe from the Polk County Builders Association supported Myers' position.

"You're looking at the big picture," he said. "You'll get 20 times as much as you're giving up."

He supported the provision in the ordinance that allows the county to impose a lien on properties that don't continue to meet the criteria for the impact fee reductions for at least seven years.

That would force the property owners to reimburse the county, according to the ordinance.

County Commissioner Randy Wilkinson supported the cuts, but said he was skeptical of Myers' assertion that impact fees had anything to do with building activity, noting the housing slowdown was happening in neighboring Hillsborough County, which has impact fees much lower than Polk's.

Wilkinson said he was concerned that the cuts could encourage development at the edge of the county that could bolster Polk's position as a bedroom community, which is less economically valuable to the county than when people live and work here.

He wondered whether the county could require anyone getting the impact fee cut to work in Polk County.

Assistant County Attorney Linda McKinley, who prepared the ordinance, told him that would be illegal.

[Tom Palmer can be reached at 863-802-7535 or tom.palmer@theledger.com. His blog on county government is at county.theledger.com.]
