

orlandosentinel.com/news/custom/growth/orl-semimpact1607aug16,0,463684.story

# OrlandoSentinel.com

## School impact fees may shoot up

### County asks district for justification after slipping enrollment

Robert Perez

Sentinel Staff Writer

August 16, 2007

SANFORD

County leaders scheduled a public hearing for October on a proposal to increase the fee on new homes to help pay for school construction.

But major questions remain about how the increase is being calculated.

County commissioners spent about 45 minutes Tuesday quizzing school officials about the method used to calculate the new fees. The proposal would boost the charge -- paid by home builders on every new residence - in four categories.

The primary question about the fees, which are charged to offset the school district's cost for growth, is how the district can justify an increase when enrollment has been down for two consecutive years.

"We're partners with you, and we want to make this work," Commissioner Mike McLean told school officials. "But we need to have numbers that we can justify to our citizens."

Commissioners have resisted the school district's efforts to increase fees, which haven't changed since they were first adopted in 1992. They have said they worry that the fee increase will be passed along in higher home prices.

Commissioner Brenda Carey said that more and more people are leaving Seminole County because housing costs are too high.

"We get more calls from people saying they can't afford to live here," she said, "which may be why enrollment is down."

The impact-fee proposal is based on a consultant's study that projected continued slow growth in student population. But enrollment has dropped about 1,800 during the past two years.



"If we use inflated numbers to do this, it may come back to hurt you," Commission Chairman Carlton Henley warned.

Commissioners concluded they would wait to schedule the public hearing until enrollment numbers are calculated for the coming school year.

"I don't want to pick a number with a third year of enrollment information," Carey said. "If you make me pick a number now, you're not going to be happy with it because I'm going to lean on the conservative side."

Deputy School Superintendent George Kosmac complained that further delays in setting new fees will only make construction costs that much higher. The current impact fee has put the school district in the position of subsidizing new growth for years, he said, noting that the fee is based on 1992 construction costs.

"Since 2002, there has been an 87 percent increase in construction costs," he said.

A provision in the new fee designed to offset increasing construction costs found zero support from county commissioners. An "escalator clause" would increase the fee as construction costs increase.

"I'm certainly not interested in scheduling a public hearing with the escalator in there," said Commissioner Dick Van Der Weide. "I want to take that out right now. It takes it [the decision to increase fees] out of the hands of the commission."

The public hearing on the proposed fee increase, without the escalator, is set for Oct. 23.

*Robert Perez can be reached at [rperez@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:rperez@orlandosentinel.com) or 407-322-1298.*

Copyright © 2007, [Orlando Sentinel](http://www.orlandosentinel.com)