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## Port St. Lucie squares off with county on fees

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Tuesday, August 21, 2007

PORT ST. LUCIE — City council members on Monday said they will stop collecting county law enforcement impact fees on new homes and businesses in 30 days unless St. Lucie County officials tell them how they plan to use the money next year and how they've spent \$706,292 collected since October 2006.

City Manager Don Cooper said he's asked St. Lucie County Administrator Doug Anderson twice for the financial reports mandated by the 2004 fee agreement but has received no response.

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City council members voted unanimously to declare the county in breach of the pact and gave Anderson 30 days to resolve the issue before the agreement is terminated.

Mayor Patricia Christensen did not attend the meeting.

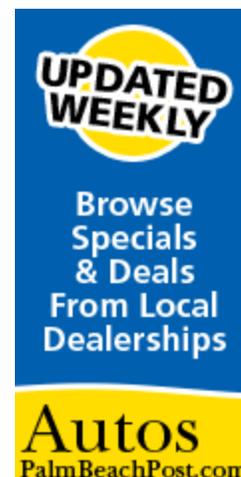
Anderson did not return a phone call Monday afternoon. Records show the Port St. Lucie fee netted \$1.2 million for the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office during each of the past two budget years. It slowed to \$706,292 in the first 10 months of this budget year because of the housing downturn.

Port St. Lucie building employees collect \$183 for each single-family home and varying amounts for commercial properties built in the city to pay for the sheriff's capital costs associated with growth.

After removing 4 percent to administer the program, the city sends 80 percent of the remainder to the sheriff's office for such capital purchases as cars and buildings. City police officers spend the rest.

The action came only a week after Vice Mayor Jack Kelly suggested eliminating the impact fee in retaliation for Sheriff Ken Mascara's removing deputies from all Port St. Lucie schools. That forced city police to fill the void while sheriff's deputies patrol schools in Fort Pierce and unincorporated areas with no help from Fort Pierce taxpayers.

Kelly did not mention that connection Monday and after the meeting, he insisted the two are not related.



"There's still some effort to work out" the matter involving revolving deputies, he said.

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