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Schools, our students need the increase in impact fees

Mike Archer

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It's time for all five county commissioners to stand up for students and pass the impact-fee increase.

All five School Board members set aside their differences and united to strongly recommend the higher impact fees. They know better than anyone that the



money is needed to build classrooms in our overcrowded, underfunded school system.

In the past, politicians denied the schools the money needed to educate the new children that growth brought to Lake County. Now parents and voters easily can see the widespread damage this caused to the school system.

Parents, local businesspeople, school leaders and education professionals -- thousands of active voters -- today stand united behind the need to bring the school system out of the poverty zone.

They are upset, as they should be, that per-pupil funding in Lake County now ranks 65th out of Florida's 67 counties. Since Florida already ranks near the bottom of American states in per-pupil funding, Lake County sits near the bottom of the bottom.

The bottom of the bottom. Is that really where this community wants its children to stay?

An underfunded school system weakens every child's chances for success. That's the cruel price children pay for Lake County's history of low school funding. And this ugly reality makes impact fees -- one of the few options available locally to support capital costs for schools -- critically important.

People who care about schools should put commissioners to the test:

Will commissioners kowtow to the growth lobby on this vote? Will they duck the issue by diverting it to a study or sending it to a committee?

Will they buy growth-lobby propaganda that impact fees create the housing slump, when everybody knows the problem is nationwide and caused by irresponsible lending, borrowing and speculating?

Or will they stand up and join the countywide effort to adequately fund the school system so it can prepare more students for work, job training, college and life-long success?

Parents, educators, businesspeople and everyone who cares about education should take no pride in Lake County's history of low school spending. It's bad for business and doubly bad for students.

When commissioners decide this issue, school supporters should pack the room and remind them who's watching. No matter how much money and clout the developers have, the people have something even more powerful when they decide to use it -- the vote.

Commissioners Welton Cadwell, Jennifer Hill, Elaine Renick, Linda Stewart and Debbie Stivender should remember that the people expect them to act responsibly, even though it may be unpopular with some developers. They can take heart in knowing that responsible developers understand the link between good schools and good growth and will not shirk their civic duty.

Responsibility demands that you stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the School Board and pass the impact-fee increase.

New growth must be good growth, which means it must pay for new classrooms.

Mike Archer of Fruitland Park is a teacher at Mount Dora High School. He is a former columnist for the Lake section of the Orlando Sentinel.

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