

10 people to tackle thorny fees

The committee is charged with sorting out a higher school impact tax.

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LAND O'LAKES - County and school district officials Monday named the members of the 10-person committee that will recommend how much school impact fees should go up.

The fees, a tax on new construction, are part of the biggest standoff between the two agencies in recent years, as the county and district struggle to agree on a state-mandated plan for schools to keep up with development.

The committee's slate is dominated by members of the development community. Builders initially shoulder the brunt of the impact fee hike, though they typically pass the cost to new homeowners.

District officials would like the school impact fees to go up to \$10,477 from \$4,356 per home now.

The county's five nominees are Stephen Booth and J. Ben Harrill, both attorneys prominent in development circles; New Port Richey developer Alex Deeb; and two builders, Michael Storrey of Morrison Homes and Ray Whatley of Suarez Housing.

Booth, Deeb and Harrill have been in the news recently, as members of an informal group that sought to influence the selection of the new county attorney. At the time, Deeb had taken a dig at County Administrator John Gallagher - with whom he is friendly - for being "no longer in charge of the county."

Gallagher was unavailable for comment Monday.

The school district's five nominees are Bob Bucklin, a retired psychologist and teacher who's worked on key school-related councils; Stewart Gibbons, president of the 5,000-acre Connerton development; Dale Maggard, a Dade City retail and wholesale appliance business owner; Joanne Hurley, a School Board candidate and Florida's Turnpike Enterprise spokeswoman; and Stan Holley, a top official at the Beck Group, a Tampa development consultancy.

The committee's first meeting is scheduled for Dec. 10, assistant school superintendent Ray Gadd said.

Top county and district officials are meeting today to try to hash out a difficult compromise on how schools should pay for "off-site" road improvements, an issue that has dogged both sides for years.

The county must deliver the two agencies' cost-sharing plan to the state by Feb. 1.

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