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BCC extends impact fees moratorium six months

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| December 17, 2010

By Bob Henderson,

Correspondent

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Clay County Commissioners have extended a moratorium on collecting the county's transportation impact fees.

At their meeting Tuesday, Dec. 14, Commissioners voted unanimously to continue the moratorium on the fees until July 1, 2011. The moratorium, put in place in 2009 to help the county's economy recover, was scheduled to run out this month.

Assistant County Attorney Fran Moss told commissioners that the Planning Board had recommended a two-year extension with a one-year review.

Nancy Garcia, speaking for the Northeast Florida Association of Realtors, said her organization also support of the extension, and Commissioner Wendell Davis, who heads the state's realtor association, said he would like more citizen input.

"Why should a business come to Clay County and pay an impact fee when he can go to surrounding counties and serve the region?," he said.

Commissioner Doug Conkey said he would support an extension. "I fear local governments are going to get steamrolled in the current (legislative) session," he said.

The July 1 date would give a new county manager, expected by end of January, time to get his feet on the ground to deal with whatever the conditions are, he said.

Tuesday's BCC meeting began with presentation of a plaque of appreciation to Chairman Travis Cummings, who is staying in the post for a second year.

"What do I do? Present it to myself?" Cummings cracked as he stepped down from the podium. That problem was solved, however, when Conkey, the vice chairman, made the presentation.

Turning to the consent agenda, most of which requires no discussion, Cummings said he had a card from a member of the audience. Travis Christiansen stepped forward to take exception to payment of \$407,600 for restoration of the big cabin at Camp Chowenwaw.

"That's a lot of money to fix up a log cabin," he said. "Some of the items seem pretty expensive," he continued. He cited \$25,000 doors and \$72,000 for electrical work. He noted that the rest of the park is being used without the cabin and suggested that it be demolished.

In response, Acting County Manager Rich O'Connell said, "The building can't be razed; we can't get rid of it." He explained that terms in the awarding of the grant that purchased the former Girl Scout camp mandated that the cabin be refurbished and set a deadline for its accomplishment. "That deadline has already past," he said.

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Commissioner Ronnie Robinson noted, "I agree with Mr. Christiansen. I want to know that this won't cost any more than the lowest bid."

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The item passed unanimously.

Harsh economies wreak havoc with budgets and may result in some odd cuts in government budgets. When former County Manager Fritz Behring was paring his proposed budget for BCC consideration, he cut one item of long standing that had accepted County responsibility for replacing driveway culverts and mail box approaches.

Commissioner Chereese Stewart protested the cut. "Driveway repair and mailbox approaches are important for protecting the edge of the pavement," she said.

"I have three driveways that need repair," Robinson said, "but I don't believe it's the government's place to give me a culvert."

Public Works Director Dave Austin noted that culvert replacement is a growing that is provided as a public service. "It will need funding," he said.

"It's not the money;" Robinson said, "it just shouldn't be done. I'm not sure everyone in Clay County should be paying for my culvert."

Commissioner Wendell Davis entered the discussion. "I'm in Mr. Robinson's corner," he said. "It can go back in next year's budget. That will give us six to nine months of watching."

Cummings brought the discussion to a close by noting that culvert replacement is not in the current year's budget but can be reconsidered for next year.

A report from JAA Executives Director Steve Grossman provided a rosier complexion to the local economy. He said the impact of Cecil Field decommissioning had been all on the plus side. He cited new and expanding businesses, new residents in Clay County and impact on businesses in the Branan Field Area.

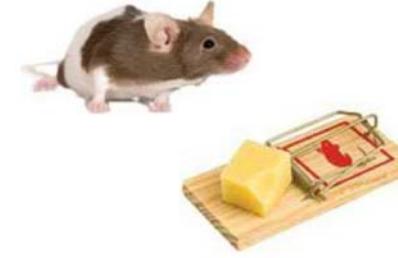
He said work on a new commercial space facility will begin after the first of the year. Commercial space use is growing, he said, and this could be the future of Cecil.

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