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## Bunnell OKs 4-year halt on building fees

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BUNNELL -- It just got cheaper to build in Bunnell.

After adopting an impact fee schedule earlier this year, city officials backpedaled Tuesday and unanimously agreed to a four-year moratorium on many of the impact fees developers must pay to build within the city.

The decision means a homeowner seeking to build a house in Bunnell will save more than \$2,000 in impact fees, while someone looking to build a 5,000-square-foot retail office building will save more than \$40,000.

Plus, those who already paid impact fees this year will be reimbursed, commissioners decided. Roughly \$9,000 will be returned, documents show.

Using figures in line with the slow growth brought on by the slumping real-estate market, the decisions will cost the city tens of thousands of dollars in revenue, community development director Mick Cuthbertson said.

But the decisions are prudent, he said. In fact, officials are hoping revenue losses from the moratorium mount much higher in the years ahead because that would likely mean the effort worked to spur development in the small city.

"Commissioners want to send out a pro-business message and show that Bunnell is open for business," Cuthbertson said.

The ordinances passed this week will halt collection of parks and recreation, fire, police and transportation impact fees. They don't release owners from water, sewer or school impact fees, though.

School impact fees are separate from city impact fees, so commissioners cannot place a moratorium on those charges, Cuthbertson said.

"We're just the middleman that collects those fees and passes them on to the school district," he said.

City Manager Armando Martinez said water and sewer impact fees were excluded from the moratorium because the city has some infrastructure improvements and growth planned in the years ahead, and that money will be needed to fund them.

The moratorium came on the heels of a workshop last month that brought local developers to the table with the city's elected officials.

Commercial developer Mark Langelo told commissioners at the workshop that small-business owners have enough trouble and expense in starting and maintaining their businesses. In the current economic climate, too many city-mandated impact fees for new

construction projects could mean a new business never even gets off the ground, Langelo said.

Now, is the worst possible time to demand that businesses pay upfront for growth, he said.

Commissioners agreed with Langelo and, at the behest of Commissioner Elbert Tucker, decided to extend a proposed yearlong moratorium to four years.

Tucker said at the meeting he felt one year wouldn't be long enough to spur the development city officials are hoping for in the coming years.

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