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Candidates offer views on impact fees

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Editor's Note: Each week, The Breeze will ask candidates for city council their views on an issue of interest to the voters. Each candidate is asked the same question in a phone interview. This week's question is: On the subject of impact fees, are there any that should be reduced, decreased or eliminated?

District 6

Kevin McGrail, a 53-year-old medical technologist and a candidate for the District 6 seat, said the problem with impact fees is that they have been increased so much in the past people are actually put off building new homes and are instead looking to buy or rent existing residences.

"We literally have sticker shock on new homes. That's why new home construction has almost come to a standstill," he said. "I would need to do a lot of research before I could recommend cutting any fees, but right now there should not be any increase."

Also seeking the District 6 post is Frank Antos Jr., a 67-year-old retired publisher.

Antos said he is against all impact fees and all revenue should be raised primarily on an ad valorem basis.

"I am in favor of certain usage fees, and I'm in favor of some developers who come in and need a lot of services paying development fees," he said.

John Cataldi, Jr., 69-year-old retired police detective, said he would like to see impact fees reduced, but would like to do more research to determine how, and to what degree, they could be cut.

District 4

Chris Chulakes-Leetz, a 53-year-old USCG-licensed captain, is seeking the District 4 position.

He said he would like to see impact fees reduced to draw competitive businesses and corporations to the Cape. Chulakes-Leetz said a reduction in residential impact fees also could be accomplished through the use of trade-off incentives such as a reduction in fees for homes built with a sprinkler system, which would reduce an extensive fire in a home and therefore the impact upon local fire departments.

"A sprinkler system in a garage, a laundry room and a kitchen could cut down on fire damage for the next 50 years by being proactive," he said.

Similar trade-offs could also be applied to commercial projects required to build to national fire protection standards.

"A good example would be Cape Harbour," he said. "Cape Harbour will never burn."

On the other hand, District 4 incumbent Dolores Bertolini, 75, said impact fees are necessary for the growth of the city.

"There is a wave of wanting to reduce fees to bring businesses here, but how can we support the city?" she said.

Bertolini said the city could consider impact fee credits to businesses as has been done in the past, but the fees can't be altogether abolished.

"We have to have something to give to the city," she said.

District 1

Jim Martin and Marty McClain are each seeking the District 1 seat. Martin, a 77-year-old retired aerospace engineer, said that all impact fees should be reduced during the present economic downturn.

"It would have a minimum impact on the city's coffers," he said. "We have to become more commercial development friendly and reducing impact fees is one way we could get commercial development started. We can think of increasing them after that."

Opponent Marty McClain, a 51-year-old construction consultant, takes an opposing view.

"The impact fees need to remain exactly the same," he said.

Mayor's race

Mayoral candidate Stephen Lovejoy is 51 and runs a document management company. He said now is not the time for reducing impact fees.

"We need to keep our revenue up. If we keep cutting revenue, we won't have any money," he said. "We can sell the city without giving up income sources."

Retired police officer and former mayor Roger Butler, 74, said Lee County's dubious distinction of having the second highest impact fees in the nation and an impact fee rise in Cape Coral of close to 150 percent in recent years has brought new construction to a near-stop and the city isn't collecting many fees anyway.

"It's time to reduce the sticker shock," he said.

Candidate John Sullivan, a 66-year-old retired broker/IT consultant, said impact fees should be reduced to give incentives for businesses to come to the Cape which will, in turn, bring more people into the city.

"Right now it (impact fees) is a deterrent. For example, if you get hit with a \$28,000 impact fee and a \$14,000 impact fee, do the math, which is going to be the most appealing?" he said.

Mayoral candidate Robert Pizzolongo, a 46-year-old Comcast employee, wants the fees eliminated.

"I'm not for fees or tax increases of any kind," he said. "The current council is just crippling the people when they should be doing more to stimulate growth in the economy."

Incumbent Mayor Jim Burch, a 58-year-old land surveyor, said impact fees can't be eliminated but there may be options to incentivize development when the time is right.

"There may be things we can do in the future. I've been watching the market and there may be a time when we may be able to help developers," he said.

For now, however, impact fees may be a necessary evil.

"They serve their purpose, which is growth paying for growth," he said. "And right now we need that."

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