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Civic Leader Opposes Decreasing Impact Fees

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BARTOW | County commissioners should not decrease impact fees on new construction, the leader of a local civic group told commissioners Wednesday.

"Impact fees are not a deterrent to growth, but necessary to finance infrastructure," David Hupp of Florida Bipartisans Civic Affairs Group told commissioners. "Good infrastructure will create growth."

Hupp's appearance came in response to a presentation by the Polk County Builders Association at the last commission meeting calling for reduction in impact fees.

He said PCBA is an industry lobbying group whose purpose is to promote its members' interests, but said sometimes that can occur at the expense of the general taxpayers.

Hupp said low impact fees in earlier times led to a infrastructure gap of between \$400 million and \$800 million in roads and other public facilities.

"We don't want to dig that hole again," he said. "If we create another gap, it falls back on the taxpayer."

He said although builders have argued that lowering or even eliminating impact fees will lead to a resurgence in the local housing market.

"Homebuilding will come back when conditions improve and not before," Hupp said.

Commissioner Randy Wilkinson said there does need to be a shift from new construction to efforts to move people into existing homes, saying the alternative is to end up like sections of Detroit, where subdivisions are being torn down because the houses are vacant.

Commissioner Jean Reed asked Hupp, who is a member of the county's Impact Fee Advisory Committee, what he thinks about current impact fee proposals.

Hupp said he feels the commission should follow the consultant's recommendations to increase school impact fees.

If they don't, they could start another deficit, he said.

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