

Collier jail impact fees to jump at least 25 percent

By I.M. STACKEL

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COLLIER COUNTY — Impact fees that help build jails – and other correctional facilities – will increase this year, just not as much – or as soon – as Collier County employees had hoped.

The proposed rate hike primarily affects residential construction, with Phase 1 – or 25 percent – increases taking effect Aug. 11.

The Phase 2 increases kick in Feb. 14 but that amount has not been determined.

Commissioners negotiated down the increase after Commission Chairwoman Donna Fiala called the original 114 percent increase proposal somewhat extreme.

It would have meant an increase from the current \$230 to \$491.75 for construction of a new 2,000-square-foot home, and a 169 percent increase for multifamily home of 1,500 square feet from the current \$94.50 to \$254.15.

Impact fees are collected from developers of new projects to offset the effect growth will have on the community. That could be anything from a need for upgraded roads to more jails. Tuesday's discussion was about more jail cells, and paying down debt on existing correctional buildings.

"Why would it go up so high (for a) single family home? That's a tremendous leap," Fiala asked Amy Patterson, the county's Impact Fee and Economic Development, which is a division of Community Development and Environmental Services.

The answer came much later in the dialogue.

The construction industry in Collier is so slow that county officials has to borrow \$1.6 million from the general revenue fund – which comes mostly from property taxes – to cover past debt on jail construction.

The \$1.6 million was the original anticipated shortfall for the upcoming year in impact fees for correctional facilities, Patterson said. That figure jumped to \$1.7 million after commissioners approved a more conservative fee hike.

While the county does need more jail cells, the Collier County Sheriff's Office has done a good job of referring cases to other types of institutions, said Commissioner Fred Coyle. For instance, if someone is picked up and seems to have a psychological problem, the David Lawrence Center will take in that person, reducing the burden on the sheriff's resources, Coyle said.

While the Productivity Committee on April 15 recommended a report, and corresponding fee increases, the Development Services Advisory Committee voted against it, Patterson said.

Commissioner Tom Henning asked for as much delay as possible in proposed impact fee increases, to give the building industry a break.

There is a state 90-day minimum statutory requirement for implementation of the increase, but the delay could be longer than that.

Also, as commissioners questioned the need for more jail cells, and the toll the increase might place on the residential construction market, County Attorney Jeff Klatzkow noted that the commission could reduce the proposed percentage of increase.

Patterson went off to her office to recalculate numbers, and returned later with some alternatives for commissioners.

Instead of a 114 percent increase, she looked at a 75 percent increase, with the same general decrease in commercial construction.

It's not an across-the-board decrease. Originally proposed was a 3 percent hike for retail space of 10,000 square feet, or, from \$6,100 to \$6,289.60; an increase in impact fees on office space of 10,000 square feet from \$2,400 to \$3,645.40, a 52 percent increase; but, a 19 percent decrease for a 3,000-square-foot pharmacy from \$1,833 to \$1,486.41.

"Whatever we cut out we have to balance from our general fund," Patterson said.

After much discussion, commissioners agreed to reduce the increase to 25 percent of the originally pitched hikes, but only for increases that take effect on Aug. 11.

When contacted after the meeting, Economic Development Council president and chief executive officer Tammie Nemecek said she wasn't aware that the commission was considering the increase in impact fees for correctional facilities.

The EDC does not have a representative on the Development Services Advisory Committee. Generally speaking, EDC members have clamored for less expensive transportation impact fees, because those are the extremely costly tabs, she said.

The EDC's general feeling about impact fee increases is that commissioners should keep them at current levels, but Nemecek said she realizes that the government is struggling financially as much as the private sector.

She said she couldn't comment on the correctional impact fees imposed, because she hadn't calculated what it would mean to businesses.

The ultimate question for both sides of the debate: Is the proposal what the market can withstand, Nemecek said.

She questioned whether increasing impact fees would make a difference, as residential construction has slowed.

"There are a lot of empty houses out there," she said.

Bill Wendell, who just took over as executive director for the Collier Building Industry Association, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Commissioners approved the amended increases by a 4-1 vote. Commissioner Frank Halas cast the dissenting vote.

Based on actual impact fee collections, and current permitting activity and forecast, the original projected increase would have generated about \$36,948, or a 7 percent increase, Patterson wrote in her executive summary to commissioners.

County commissioners will meet again at 9 a.m. today for a strategic planning workshop, although an agenda was not immediately available.

The meeting is on the third floor of the Collier County Administration Building, 3301 U.S. 41 East.

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