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Thursday, April 22, 2010

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Commission grapples with impact fees, land development code, more

Submitted by Robby Douglas on Tue, 04/20/2010 - 8:47pm.

The Citrus County Commission's plate had sideboards on it today in an agenda-item cornucopia that that spanned nearly five hours.

Commissioners heard from Duncan and Associates in the company's studies of the county impact fee system and land-use regulations, as well as comments from the public and businesses.

In advance of discussion of those two topics, commissioners were told that a bond issue totaling a little more than \$25 million had been approved by commission chairman Gary Bartell. The county was able to lock in a rate of 4.14 percent, and the bond loan will mature on Oct. 1, 2030.

Impact fees

Representatives for Duncan and Associates told commissioners the number of categories of businesses paying impact fees has grown from 29 to 39, and were mostly retail. The company suggested the county could eliminate certain fee types, such as EMS, since those services only produce about \$18,000 per year; law enforcement, which brings in about \$75,000, and fees for public buildings, which brings in \$200,000, which is only used to pay down the county's debt service. The company also suggested a two-tier road fee system and elimination of park fees since, a representative said, there are no near-term plans to acquire more land.

Possible alternative funding sources for the county include an increase in the county ad valorem tax. Although the county's gasoline tax is at max, the county is currently under the 10-mil state-mandated cap. A consultant also suggested the county could institute fees for library and fire functions. The county could even look into a local-option one-half to one-cent sales tax.

By and large, commissioners commended the consultants on the study, but each commissioner had his own list of preferences, such as the imposition of mobility fees, which is a per-trip fee, according to commissioner John Thrumston. Commissioner Winn Webb wanted to be sure any revenues lead to Citrus County being cheaper, or competitive with surrounding counties. Commissioner Dennis Damato had a long list of suggestions, including allowing individuals (not companies) to prepay their due fees and a number of other suggestions. He added that Citrus County lacked dining, shopping and medical venues, which may keep people and businesses from settling here.

Commissioner Joe Meek suggested, and Duncan and Associates agreed it might be possible, to have commissioners' suggestions incorporated into consultant recommendations and action taken by the county commission within 90 to 120 days.

After public comment, commissioners decided, at commissioner Thrumston's suggestion, to temporarily suspend transportation fees until the 90- to 120-day period had expired for the county to adopt any Duncan and Associates recommendations. That public hearing has been set for May 11.

Chairman Bartell reminded commissioners that suspension of any impact fee monies would come at a cost. "Remember, board members, somebody has to pay the bill."

Land Development Code

Commissioners were also briefed by Duncan and Associates consultants the county's land development code was bureaucratic and needed a better organization of material to be more useful to business and the public. A consultant said that some things he could not change because some people wanted things left in the code because they depended on the information.



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Perhaps the most graphic description of the code came from local attorney Clark Stilwell, who showed commissioners a photo of the land development code and other documents - nearly one foot tall when stacked atop one another - that were all needed to get anything done, and which referred to each other in getting that thing done. He noted that at one time, the county's code was lauded by the state as a model document, but that since that time, the county had amended that document about 250 times.

During discussion, commissioners all seemed to agree the land development code was difficult for anyone to navigate, and should be stripped of outdated, archaic regulation. At the same time, however, they were careful to say the integrity of the intent of the code should not be lost, and that good code should stay in that document.

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COMMUNITY

Happy Trails To You



While everyone was giving to the federal government on April 15, the

county was cutting a ribbon at a Rails to Trails park in Hernando.

FEATURES

Five-year fundraiser ends



The Citrus Memorial

Health System (CMH) has ended its five-year fundraiser after having raised more than \$1.5 million.

COLUMNS/BLOGS

State: Move It On Over



State law requires motorists to move over when emergency vehicles approach, or stopped by the roadway with flashing lights. But are we doing that?

COUNTY

New county attorney



Richard Wesch has been kicking around Citrus County in several positions, and now has landed a job as the new County Attorney.

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- SEAL Not Guilty in Iraq Abuse Case

Poll

Should people be allowed to swim with manatees?:

- Yes. It doesn't harm them, and contact is closely monitored.
- No. It harms the animals.
- Yes. Manatee deaths happen from things other than contact with humans.
- No. Manatees have survived for centuries. Now we run over them with boats and annoy them with contact.

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