

## Hernando builders, Realtors question fairness of impact fee to support schools

BROOKSVILLE — When it comes to impact fees in Hernando County, there's no tougher audience than homebuilders and Realtors, groups that have adamantly opposed the one-time levies on new construction for years.

That's what made an informational meeting on Thursday so interesting.

For roughly 90 minutes, Hernando school officials and consultants met with builders, real estate agents and others to make a presentation concerning the proposed reinstatement of educational impact fees. "This kind of meeting has never occurred," said Roland "Bo" Bavota, director of facilities for the school district.

Under the district's proposal, the county would charge a fee of \$6,988 on new single-family homes. The School Board approved the fee in November. Now it goes before the County Commission, which is scheduled to consider it Feb. 11.

The presentation by the consulting firm of Tindale-Oliver & Associates received a skeptical reception from the roughly 15 people in attendance. The consultants were peppered with questions about the methodology of the district's fee study and the growth projections it included.

The presentation focused on how the study was conducted and the findings from a related technical study. The district says it has about \$222.8 million in unfunded critical needs over the next 10 years, including school expansions, technology and maintenance. It also has \$109.7 million in debt, which could be paid off with impact fees.

Many of those in attendance said the resumption of the education impact fee would be too much of a burden on the county's struggling housing market. While they said they realized the need to provide for students, they thought too much of the burden would be placed on the backs of new homeowners.

Bob Eaton, owner of Artistic Homes, questioned some of the assumptions that were used in the methodology.

"Demand to build new homes is stuck at a recession low not seen in this county for 40 years," Eaton said. "The building industry is not ready. We do not have any kind of demand situation where people are willing to pay additional dollars for a new house."

He did say he appreciated the presentation and found it enlightening.

Mary Mazzuco, president of the Hernando Builders Association, said she valued the opportunity to learn more about the district's situation and to share the builders' perspective.

She said everyone agrees that children need to be educated. The problem, she said, is, "Where does the money come from?"

She said she believes the district should be looking at alternative funding options.

Chris Glover, chief operating officer for Palmwood Construction, said he is not opposed to the public funding of education, but believes the proposed impact fee would be too big of a burden.

"We respectfully disagree that it should be put on the backs of the few people who are deciding to build residential," Glover said. "I think a sales tax extension, or a possible discussion of an increase, would be far better."

Hernando builders, Realtors question fairness of impact fee to support schools 01/16/14 [Last modified: Thursday, January 16, 2014 7:27pm]

