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County Considers Impact Fee Moratorium

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BARTOW | Polk County commissioners agreed Thursday to consider a one-year moratorium on impact fees next month.

Commissioners are scheduled to consider the change July 7.

It was unclear Thursday when the moratorium would take effect, but county officials said it should happen soon after the vote if commissioners approve the change.

Impact fees are fees charged on new development to pay for the costs of providing facilities and services to handle the impacts of that growth.

The moratorium would affect impact fees for transportation, fire, police, jail, parks, ambulance and the library, but not the school impact fee, according to Thursday's discussion.

Commissioners are scheduled to consider school impact fees separately at a public hearing Wednesday, based on a recently completed study.

The moratorium proposal has been pushed by some members of the local business community who have been lobbying commissioners and a Facebook group.

When commissioners discussed the proposal during a work session Thursday afternoon, the rationale for the decrease was to try to do something to ease economic conditions by removing what some consider a barrier to development.

Commissioner Ed Smith said he thought the moratorium would encourage commercial development, which would create jobs.

"I'm not sure what the effect is going to be," Smith said.

Commissioner Sam Johnson said he was interested in removing barriers to jobs, too.

Commission Chairman Bob English said he was torn on the issue.

He said the economy is the worst he has seen in the more than 30 years he has been in business.

But, he said, he was troubled by the loss of the \$6.5 million in potential revenue from impact fees in next year's budget.

"I am for impact fees; growth has to pay for itself," English said, but he added it might be more palatable to forgo \$6.5 million revenue now than it would have been at the height of the building boom when the county collected \$35 million in impact fees.

Commissioner Jean Reed said she wondered how the moratorium would affect planned road projects.

"We're already struggling to find money for roads," she said. "I'd like to hear what our plans are to make up the money."



The result would be the delay of some projects, said Todd Bond from the county's budget office.

County Manager Mike Herr said he will prepare a list of projects that would be affected.

Herr told commissioners the impact fees and other transportation funds has improved the infrastructure situation.

However, he said, a one-year moratorium probably would not seriously set back the work.

Reed said she remained skeptical of the idea, based on a conversation she had with a commissioner from Highlands County, which has already enacted a moratorium.

She said she was told it had no effect on construction.

Reed also wondered whether there might be unintended consequences, such as eliminating the advantage for developing in downtown and other blighted areas, which now already enjoy impact fee exemptions.

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