

County commission suspends impact fees

[MATHEW PELLEGRINO](#)

2009-12-15 16:39:21

Santa Rosa County commissioners seem to be wavering over a fee they implemented in 2006.

The transportation impact fee that was implemented in an effort to raise money for road improvements in Santa Rosa County is steadily becoming the road less traveled.

At Thursday's county commission an emergency ordinance was approved that will suspend the imposition of the transportation impact fees through Dec. 31, 2010.

The ordinance was approved unanimously by all commissioners to be suspended, but they agreed further discussion on the issue should be brought up at the start of next year's commission meetings.

This action was nothing new to commissioners, as the impact fee had been suspended since this past January from a vote made at a county commission goal setting workshop on Jan. 29.

All projects requiring a building permit in 2009 had their impact fees waived.

One of the major reasons for suspending the impact fees by commissioners was to hopefully stimulate some building in Santa Rosa County which has come almost to a halt due to the economic climate.

The price of the fee was determined based on the type and location of the project. The cost of construction for rural road segments was made less than the cost of construction for urban road segments.

"When I voted on this, I did not intend it to stop or slow growth," Commissioner Don Salter said. "This was used to ensure growth in the area."

Commissioner Chairman Gordon Goodin voted to approve the suspension of the impact fees until Dec. 31, 2010. He also added an additional proposal to review the ordinance at a commission meeting in the early part of next year, which was also approved.

"Setting this date for January does not mean we will implement these fees in January," Goodin said. "This will only be a review of the change that the board requested."

Lane Lynchard said suspending the transportation impact fee should not limit the board from coming back and revisiting the idea of re-implementing them

"We are revisiting the issue, but we will have a debate on it one way or another," Lynchard said. "Some members feel we should get rid of it, and others feel we should keep it."

The fee could hurt the county more than it could help it Commissioner Don Salter said at Thursday's meeting. With several developers hunkering down in the economy, hearing news that they have to pay an additional fee on top of their other expenses can turn away their business.

Jim Williamson said this fee not only affects the builders, but also hurts the consumers.

"It's not just the developers that are affected by this," Williamson said. "The cost is passed onto the consumers."

Commissioner Bob Cole said as of now, the ordinance should be suspended, but argued that more public input should be implemented before commissioners vote again on the fee next December.

“We go through a lengthy process to get public input,” Cole said. “I feel like before it is re-imposed, we need to put a footnote that at this point in time next year, we need to get more opinions on the fee.”

Gordon Goodin admitted that the impact fee should have undergone more research before it was voted on back in 2006, and it may now be hurting economic growth in the county.

“I voted on this to get a few extra dollars to pay for some roads, but I was wrong,” Goodin said. “Growth is paying for itself.”