



## County extends impact fee halt

By Ryan Smith, News-Leader

The Nassau County Commission has voted to extend by six months its suspension of impact fee collection.

The commission voted 4-1 on Nov. 23 to continue the suspension, with Commissioner Mike Boyle dissenting.

The commission suspended impact fees in July 2008 in an effort to jump-start the economy. The fees are paid by developers, and are meant to help fund new growth. However, while the county has recently approved several new impact fee projects, it has historically had a difficult time navigating the bureaucratic obstacles required to legally spend the fees.

Commissioner Stacy Johnson said that while the fee suspension has not had the salutary economic effect hoped for, she felt extending it might have benefits in the future.

"Personally, I think you as a board took the initiative," said Johnson, who was not yet a commissioner when the suspension took effect. "We were the first county to waive impact fees. ... I think if we give it another six months we might be able to be competitive in attracting businesses from surrounding counties."

Johnson said the county needed to provide incentives for business during tough economic times.

"If we decide to put the impact fees back on, I think we need to have a discussion on what we're going to do to help small business," she said.

"I'm not in favor of reinstating them at the moment either," said Commissioner Danny Leeper. "It's going to create pressure on the board" to waive fees on a case-by-case basis in the weeks following reinstatement, he said.

"Once we do reinstate them, I'm not going to be in the mood to waive them," Leeper added.

Boyle, however, felt the suspension had gone on long enough.

"This is one of those issues where I respectfully disagree with my colleagues," he said after the meeting. "They believe the elimination of the impact fee will persuade someone to buy a new home, and for over a year I have found no evidence that has actually occurred."

Reinstating fee collection is especially important now that new impact fee projects are being approved, Boyle added.

"We have finally devised a program that allows us to invest the impact fees in constructing the infrastructure that new growth demands," he said. "That hasn't always been the case, but the current commission has made great strides in this area."

Still, Boyle said his split with the rest of the commissioners wasn't a criticism of their position.

"I actually think it's healthy for the commission to have split votes, particularly on

critical issues," he said. "I believe it shows we listen to all sides, and then vote our conscience."

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