

# County mulls payment plan for impact fee

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Trying to attract new business and industry to St. Johns County, the County Commission on Tuesday began a process that the board believes should lower the sticker shock some businesses feel when they learn how much they'd need to pay to move here.

The Consolidated Impact Fee Ordinance of the St. Johns County Land Development Code establishes a five-year installment payment plan option for businesses that must pay more than \$50,000 in impact fees.

Growth Management Director Suzanne Konchan said, "Currently, impact fees must be paid in full prior to the building's electrical energizing."

Under this plan, the company would pay 20 percent of its fees each year for five years.

There are many anecdotal stories about how St. Johns County's high impact fees keep out industries that would have brought good paying jobs here.

According to Konchan, a company wishing to take advantage of the deferral plan must get approval from the County Commission for the agreement.

The agreement terms establish a fixed interest rate, provide for recording a lien against the property being constructed, and require the applicant to post a Letter of Credit to ensure full payment,

One more thing: No refunds.

The county believes impact fees are "one of the preferred and recommended forms of ensuring that new development bears a proportionate share of the cost of roads, parks, schools and public capital facilities."

However, "The School District will not allow its impact fees to be deferred," Konchan said. "They are facing a significant (financial) challenge."

The county already has "systems in place," Konchan said, to separate school impact fees (which must be paid immediately) with parks, fire and transportation fees, which now can be deferred.

Commissioner Ken Bryan said the deferral plan is "a significant step" by the board that could help the county's economic development.

Commission Chair Cyndi Stevenson suggested adding a sunset provision into the ordinance language.

County Administrator Mike Wanchick said, "That's not a bad idea. It gives

you control."

The sunsetting would occur at the five-year mark, the commissioners agreed.

County administrators will be conducting a complete study of the impact fee system over the next six to eight months.

The board has scheduled the ordinance to be heard by the Planning & Zoning Agency on Oct. 15, with the second reading and public hearing set before the commission on Oct. 20.

"We think it's an important tool for us to have available," Konchan said.

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