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County to mull impact fee freeze

By MICHAEL D. BATES | Hernando Today

Published: October 7, 2009

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BROOKSVILLE - Supporters of a short-term moratorium on impact fees got some high-level backing Tuesday when the school board voted 4-1 to at least consider the possibility.

But the heavy lifting on the matter will come Tuesday, when county commissioners sit down formally to discuss the temporary suspension of impact fees to spur new residential construction in Hernando County. County Commission Chairman Dave Russell said he looks forward to that workshop, where residents will be able to chime in during the debate.

"I'm going to wait to see the information that is presented — all the numbers and figures," Russell said. "I'm open to anything that will help make business better."

County Commissioner John Druzbeck said he wants the workshop to be an "open discussion on all the alternatives we can think of that will help the county."

Druzbeck said he would like to get statistics on how this plan would not only put people back to work but how it could possibly bring in additional ad valorem taxes to the county.

Bob Eaton, owner of Artistic Homes and chairman of the Hernando Builders Association government affairs committee, said there is a "temporary crisis of employment" here and the relaxing of fees would attract more homebuyers and put people back to work.

"It's about jobs," Eaton said during the Sept. 22 county commission meeting. "It's about putting people back to work."

Spurring home construction would have a "multiplier effect" on other segments of the local economy, he said.

"What chance does it have to work?" he asked. "There's no crystal ball." And in a resolution sent to the board, local builder Jeff West, chairman of the Hernando County Liaison Committee, said a lack of incentives for new building "makes it impossible to compete with existing residential sales."

Planning Director Ron Pianta has spent the past several weeks gathering information from other counties and how impact fees are applied there.

On Tuesday, school board members voted 4-1 to convey to the county commission they are at least willing to discuss a possible moratorium on school impact fees, even though it is expected to cost the district some \$1.4 million in revenue.

Last March, the school district opposed any impact fee moratorium and even fired off a letter to the county stating that any such move would be disruptive.

The school district currently gets \$4,200 for every new home constructed in the county. That one-time hit to homeowners goes to fund capital improvements in the community and pay for services such as libraries and roads.

Homeowners and business owners pay the impact fee upfront, at the time the permit is issued.

County commissioners will discuss the impact fee moratorium during their business meeting which begins at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the Hernando County Government Center, 20 North Main St. in downtown Brooksville.

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