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County balks at hospital's impact fee exemption request

BY [SARAH FAY CAMPBELL](#)

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Piedmont-Newnan Hospital's pleas to be exempted from impact fees fell on deaf ears at Tuesday's meeting of the Coweta County Board of Commissioners.

Piedmont-Newnan CEO Michael Bass asked that the hospital be exempted from both impact fees and building permit fees. Bass said that any money saved by the exemptions would be put back into the building and grounds.

The county can't waive building permit fees, by law, said Chairman Tim Higgins.

The county has waived impact fees for private schools and churches before, and it can also waive impact fees for industrial projects.

The criteria are an "extraordinary benefit over what a normal business would bring into the community," said County Attorney Jerry Ann Conner.

Commissioner Paul Poole made a motion Tuesday that the hospital not be exempted. The total impact fees for the hospital will be just over \$1.1 million. That amount includes fire and transportation impact fees of more than \$800,000.

Commissioner Tim Lassetter serves on the county's impact fee committee. Because of the fire district tax and the fire department funding crunch, the committee's preference was "that we seriously consider before we waive any impact fees, but especially the fire tax."

The hospital will definitely impact the fire department, said Commissioner Randolph Collins. There will also be a traffic impact. But the hospital probably won't impact the jail or sheriff's office.

Collins made a motion to waive the jail and sheriff's office fees, but it died for lack for a second.

The vote to deny the exemption was unanimous.

The board also voted to deny a request from Delta Community Credit Union. When the plans for the project were initiated, Coweta did not have impact fees for transportation. There were several issues with the plans for the credit union, and getting approval from the county planning department and the Coweta

County Water and Sewerage Authority took several months.

The building permit was issued exactly one day after the county instituted the transportation impact fees. The credit union asked Tuesday to be exempted only from the transportation fees. The credit union has already paid \$143,000 in impact fees, said County Administrator Theron Gay. The transportation fees are an additional \$128,540.

"I think overall the staff thinks they turned the projects over in a timely manner," said Gay. And the water and sewer authority "felt like there were a lot of revisions that were required to make the building meet the standards," Gay said.

Poole made a motion to deny the request. The vote was 4-1, with Leigh Schlumper opposed.

Later in the meeting, the board discussed possibly changing the methodology used to calculate impact fees.

There has been some discussion of changing the way the transportation impact fee is calculated for commercial uses, Gay said.

The consultant who did the county's impact fees said he could do the methodology for approximately \$16,000 and the annual update for \$8,700.

If the methodology doesn't change, the county staff can do the annual update in house.

Lassetter said that, at the last impact fee committee meeting, two members felt there should be some changes, but "the rest of the group felt like it was fine as it is."

He recommended the county continue with the "same methodology we have."

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