

# North Port extends road impact fee moratorium

By [Dale White](#)

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A two-year moratorium on road impact fees imposed on new construction and set to expire Friday instead will be continued for at least another year.

That will save builders \$1,928 on each new new house. Impact fees are designed to help pay for infrastructure that is needed to meet the needs of new development, such as new or expanded roads.

But as the building industry struggled to get back on its feet after the Great Recession, the city voted to suspend the fees to encourage builders and to keep homes more affordable.

The city signaled, however, that with economic conditions improving, the breaks will be ending. While approving another year's moratorium on the road impact fees, the City Commission unanimously agreed this week to restore the solid waste impact fee, which was also in the moratorium. The solid waste fee, used to expand garbage service, will be \$149.50 levied on builders for each single-family home.

Impact fees for parks, fire and ambulance service, law enforcement and general government — which were slashed in half two years ago — remain in effect.

The city has seen an uptick in residential building permits since it enacted the moratorium. It issued 287 permits for new homes in 2013, compared with 206 the previous year and 94 in 2011.

The moratorium appeared to have little effect on commercial building permits, of which 48 were issued last year compared with the same number in 2012 and 46 in 2011.

Speaking on behalf of the 550-member North Port Area Chamber of Commerce, former city commissioner Fred Tower said another year of reduced fees will keep North Port “competitive” with other communities that cut or continued moratoriums on impact fees.

Although building permits are on the rise, “the economy remains fragile,” Tower said.

Noting that road impact fees can only be used for “new roadways,” Commissioner Linda Yates said she could justify continuing not to collect those fees because the city currently has no new roads on its list of pending projects.

Mayor Jim Blucher said he continued the moratorium on road fees not to assist the major, nationally known builders but to help “independent, local builders. . . because they're the last to come back and they are just beginning to come back.”

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