

IMPACT FEE DELAY HURTS HERNANDO ECONOMY

By Lara Bradburn

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Editor's note: Brooksville Mayor Lara Bradburn, a member of the Metropolitan Planning Organization, delivered these remarks to Hernando commissioners April 23, the day the commission delayed for at least another year, restoring impact fees for transportation improvements. The comments are edited for length and clarity.

As most of you are probably aware, the current city council inherited quite a backlog of infrastructure transportation needs for our city. And, we've been pecking away at that list for the last five years. According to the consultant that we hired, the city of Brooksville is looking at \$21 million just to bring our roads and sidewalks up to a 60 percent standard. Twenty one million dollars. On top of that we're going to need about \$1.3 million just to fix our current inventory of sidewalks, another \$1.2 million to rehab our brick streets

That's quite a lot for a city of five square miles and, you know, has a general fund of about \$7 million. I bring that up because I received word that the county commission opted to reject a consultant's plan for impact fees — a plan that was endorsed by every stakeholder who attended the workshops on that issue.

I try not to interfere with discussions that are the sole discretion of the county commission, but this decision ... directly affects city taxpayers.

When developers are not invited to share the cost of new growth impacts, every taxpayer in the county, including those who reside in the city of Brooksville, are forced to pay the bill for new growth. I understand (the county staff) just completed a capital needs plan that calls for millions and millions of dollars in the general fund money, supported by city taxpayers as well, to be spent on maintaining just our existing infrastructure. And that doesn't even begin to address the county's overall transportation need. Last I checked, it was well over \$120 million.

Now, you add the costs of new impacts ... and I just have to keep asking, "How are we going to pay for that?" And, come fall, we're going to be competing heavily with Citrus County for state road dollars as well. How do we pay for what we already have?

I attended those stakeholders meetings, as representing the city and the MPO, and those who actually listened to the stark reality presented in that report by our consultants, they understood and they accepted the need for impact fees. And they unanimously, unanimously, supported the consultant's recommendation.

They also unanimously endorsed a need for an exclusive sales tax increase for transportation only. Now, I don't know if that's the answer or not, but something needs to be done to protect what we already have. And, I don't have all the answers to that, I admit, but I would respectfully ask that the county commission take another look at that issue. Because, the bottom line is, without a significant increase in county taxes at this point, which I don't think any of us want, and which also are paid by city taxpayers who pay county taxes, the existing transportation needs that we have cannot be met. And, without decent roads and walkable communities, people won't move here and new businesses certainly won't come here and there will be no jobs to employ those that are already here.

This is an economic issue. I would respectfully ask the county commission look at the information that staff has tucked away and just look at the full picture and see what we can do to address those needs.