

New Hernando budget advisory group backs impact fees, new half-cent sales tax for schools

A newly formed budget advisory committee for the Hernando County School District is endorsing two money-making options that could generate roughly \$140 million for the district over the next 10 years.

At the committee's meeting last week, the group of school and community stakeholders backed the School Board's recent resolution to approve an educational impact fee and also threw its support behind a new 10-year, half-cent sales tax.

The Hernando County Commission later this month will consider ending the moratorium on the collection of an educational impact fee, a one-time levy on new home construction. The latest impact fee study recommends a fee of roughly \$7,000 for a single-family home.

In the midst of that the decision, the district is also preparing for the end of the current half-cent sales tax later this year.

The advisory committee is suggesting that a new tax be used for two purposes:

- Deferred maintenance and capital expenditures.
- Technology hardware and software.

George Gall, the district's chief financial officer, forecasts the district will need to spend roughly \$144 million on capital needs and \$53 million paying off debt in the next five years.

"It's forecasting, but it's forecasting with some pretty good numbers," Gall said.

The district will likely pay off its debt first, he said.

The budget advisory committee was formed by new superintendent Lori Romano and is part of an effort to better tie the district's finances to its needs.

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