

Lake School Board wants to reinstate impact fees after losing \$24 million

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Lake school district leaders Monday said they want impact fees reinstated to help pay for future school building needs after losing \$24 million because of a two-year suspension.

School Board members said they want the fees reinstated to help pay for new growth and also suggested they want to discuss raising taxes in the future. The fees are charged by the county to developers and are passed along to homebuyers in the price of a house. County Commissioners have suspended the fees until December to try to promote building, but School Board members say growth is happening and the cash is needed

"In the South end, in my district, we have real issues," said board member Tod Howard, who lives in Clermont. "We have real capacity issues, and we're going to have to have a funding source to deal with it."

The district now gets a one-third penny sales tax worth about \$10 million a year until 2017 to help pay for capital needs. Any new sales or property taxes, however, can't be charged until after that expires.

Howard, along with board members Rosanne Brandeburg and Debbie Stivender, supported a \$5,146 impact fee for single-family homes. To get the fee reinstated, school board members would have to formally ask the county commission to do so. They're planning a vote next Monday.

The discussion over funding sources comes after district officials closed the \$16.3 million shortfall in their 2013-14 budget by slashing 65 teaching positions, cutting courtesy busing for 4,300 students, and removing high-school testing coordinators and extra guidance counselors.

School chief financial officer Carol MacLeod said the budgeting this year was "very tight" since the district relied on roughly \$55 million in federal stimulus money for the last four years to keep itself afloat. That money is now gone.

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