

School Board waives impact fee for third consecutive year

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For the third consecutive year, the School Board plans to suspend collection of school impact fees — money levied on new residential construction to pay for growth within the school district.

Though the board reached a consensus during a work session Thursday, the board must formally vote on the matter at a future board meeting. Then the County Commission must sanction the move.

During a brief conversation, the board noted the district already has \$6.2 million of unused impact fee funds that need to be spent on growth-related capital expenses such as new schools, additions and land.

Theresa Boston-Ellis, the district's executive director of business services, said portions of the remaining balance must be spent in accordance with a strict timetable or it will have to be returned — a process that officials say would be complicated.

The reason for the complexity: In some cases construction companies pay the fee and pass it to the homeowner. If the original owner no longer owns the home, who gets the refunded impact fee?

The district must spend \$1.3 million of the balance by 2013-14, \$2.5 million by 2014-15, \$1.2 million by 2015-16, \$958,000 by 2016-17, \$221,000 by 2017-18 and \$42,000 by 2018-19.

The ending dates are based on the county's fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30. The School District's fiscal year ends on June 30.

The School Board consensus was that since the district's student population has remained stagnant since the economic downturn began in late 2007, the board couldn't in good faith collect more impact fees.

The end result is that, if approved by the county, the fee will not be collected between Oct. 1, 2013 and Sept. 30, 2014. The board will revisit the impact fee again in spring 2014 for 2014-15.

In 2010-11, the last time the impact fee was collected, it was \$2,166 for a multi-family housing unit, \$3,967 for single-family homes and \$3,461 for mobile homes.

Boston-Ellis handed out an impact fee budget on Thursday that showed \$11.5 million was collected from 2005-06 through 2010-11.

As of Thursday, the district still has nearly \$6.2 million of that.

The district has spent nearly \$5.3 million on growth-related projects, such as the Emerald Shores Elementary School wing.

The only new school under construction is Legacy Elementary School in Silver Springs Shores, which is expected to open in August. That school is being paid for with half-cent sales tax revenue earmarked for the project.

David Herlihy, planning and governmental relations manager, also addressed the board on Thursday. He gave the board a detailed map showing many more available properties in Marion Oaks for future school sites.

Some school officials expect the area to explode as the economy rebounds. There are 27,000 available lots in the massive, sprawling subdivision.

The district just entered into a lease option for 92 acres in Marion Oaks. This land, called the Summur LLC acreage, will likely be the site of a high school in the distant future.

Though board member Ron Crawford does not expect the growth will be as brisk as many experts may think, he would support buying more connecting acres south of Summer LLC. Crawford said that though much of the adjacent property was a sand mine and couldn't be used to build a school, one part could be used for a sports complex and the other could become part of a world-class agriculture program.

"The land just talks to you," Crawford said.

Board member Nancy Stacy agreed, stating "we could do it and name it 'Crawford Cow Pasture.' "

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