

# County eliminates impact fees

by SARAH FAY CAMPBELL

After Jan. 1, Coweta County will still have impact fees, but only in theory.

Coweta's impact fee will become \$0, following Tuesday night's action by the Coweta County Board of Commissioners.

The commissioners unanimously approved an amendment to the county's Development Impact Fee ordinance Tuesday reducing the fees to \$0 in every class and category.

"The impact fees are gone as of Jan. 1, 2014," Commission Chairman Bob Blackburn said after the vote.

The fees were previously charged on all new construction, whether residential, commercial or industrial. The fee was set based on the proposed use of the buildings.

Certain developments, such as non-profit hospitals and large job creators, were exempt from the fees.

It's the third time the commissioners have voted to reduce the impact fees. In 2010, they capped the per square foot impact fee, to reduce the exorbitant fees that uses such as fast food restaurants and convenience stores faced. In 2012, they reduced the fees by only assessing 25 percent of the total cost of road projects, instead of 50 percent, and 50 percent instead of 100 percent of the cost of other projects, when calculating the fee. Coweta's impact fees were for the jail, Coweta County Sheriff's Office, Coweta County Fire Department, roads, and parks and recreation projects. The 2012 decision also allowed impact fees to be paid in installments.

Tuesday's decision was hailed as a good one for business.

Dennis McEntire, representing the Newnan-Coweta Chamber of Commerce, thanked the commissioners for their decision and their "willingness to listen to the business development and the economic development communities."

"I know they have been talking to you for years about this issue," McEntire said during the meeting. He added that he was surprised the commissioners actually voted to set the impact fees at zero.

"I applaud you so much for listening to the business community and making this tough decision. I know it was long and hard," McEntire said.

Blackburn said he anticipates that increased development will more than make up for any money the county might be losing by not charging impact fees. Especially since the vast majority of business in Coweta County is small business.

And small businesses are the ones hardest hit by impact fees, said Commissioner Tim Lassetter. "The ones that are large enough and have enough investment or enough jobs — they're exempt anyway," Lassetter said.

Impact fees "may have had their place and time," Blackburn said after the meeting. But "this is not the place and it's certainly not the time."

For an expanded version of this story, see Thursday's print and electronic versions of The Newnan Times-Herald.