

# 'Mobility fee' a possible source to pay for roads

By Garrett Pelican, *News-Leader*

By 2035, new shopping centers, industrial parks and warehouses could be sprouting up all over Nassau County, and new streets, sidewalks and intersections designed to relieve traffic could be joining them.

An overhauled "fair share" system proposed to replace transportation impact fees and concurrency would steer Nassau's growth in a more "efficient" direction, county traffic consultants told the commission Monday.

The proposed mobility fee, presented in draft form to commissioners at their joint meeting with the Impact Fee & Concurrency Task Force on Monday afternoon, would target traffic needs east and west of I-95 and inside a planned Rayonier development in Yulee before fees are collected.

A mobility plan could be introduced as soon as July or August, Commission Chair Danny Leeper said at the meeting.

"It doesn't make you upgrade roads that aren't failing today," said consultant Nick Gillette, of Gillette & Associates, who added that it would address and fix only "real" traffic issues.

Mobility fees would replace transportation concurrency: a costly and lengthy process by which developers previously had to gauge the impact their developments would have on roadway capacity before starting new projects. That cumbersome process, Gillette said, shut out small, mom-and-pop businesses that could not afford to spend time and money on projects that might never get under way.

In February 2012, the commission voted to nix concurrency.

"You no longer have to spend several years and hundreds of thousands of dollars on traffic studies just to have the ability to develop," Gillette said in a telephone interview Tuesday.

Akin to but distinct from impact fees, mobility fees would bill developers to pay for the construction of new infrastructure - such as roadway improvements, signal upgrades and sidewalks - demanded by new development. But mobility fees, consultant Sandra Gorman of King Engineering said Monday, focus more on traffic efficiency versus capacity.

And unlike impact fees, developers would have a clear idea of where their money would be spent before plunking down cash on new rooftops. "You're going to be able to plan the project in front of collecting the money," County Attorney David Hallman told the board at Monday's meeting.

Using impact fees, the county and municipalities would collect the money and then later "devise" ways to spend them, Gillette said Tuesday. But, "The mobility plan gives you a specific outline of projects, so you know where the money is going - there's more direction," he said.

So far, the task force and consultants have formed a fee schedule that would charge most developers of residential, commercial and industrial projects similar amounts to what they paid in impact fees - with a few exceptions. Job-creating developments, such as large-scale shopping centers, warehouses and industrial parks, would receive discounts, said Gillette.

"We did incentivize some areas, like the industrial (developments) and job creators," he said, noting that the proposed fee schedule was a draft and could change.

Three zones would comprise the plan: east of I-95, west of I-95 and the East Nassau Community Planning Area - a planned 24,000-acre development owned by Rayonier in Yulee.

The consultants also identified a list of projects totaling roughly \$21 million that would relieve traffic and accommodate the county's growth on both the west and east sides. The list of projects could change and the consultants urged the commission to review the county's growth as often as every five years and adjust the list growth demands.

West of I-95 would benefit from \$7 million worth of improvements to the intersection at US 301 and US 1. Projects proposed east of I-95 include:

~~ \$2.6 million for an A1A alternative on Clinch Drive

~~ \$4.1 million to widen Amelia Island Parkway near the 14th Street roundabout and Buccaneer Trail

~~ \$3.3 million for turn-lane additions to CR 105

~~ \$1.4 million for a roadway alternative for Buccaneer Trail - Amelia Island Parkway/A1A

~~ \$2.3 million for realignment on US 17 and turn lanes and intersection work there.

The commission halted its collection of impact fees, which have drawn criticism from developers for being excessive and stifling growth, in June 2008. The developers behind a proposed 10-screen multi-plex movie theater in Yulee were wary of planning their project there due to the possibility of having to pay \$180,000 in impact fees, task force Vice Chair and Planning Board Chair Tom Ford told the board Monday.

Commissioners have since continued that moratorium, most recently at Monday's meeting when they voted unanimously 4-0 to extend the freeze, which would have expired in June, until September.