

East Naples church figuring how to come up with \$245,000 in county fees POLL

By JENNA BUZZACCO-FOERSTER

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NAPLES — The new building is finally open.

But now New Hope Ministries, 7675 Davis Blvd., has another hurdle to overcome: Figuring out how to pay the impact fees.

The East Naples church asked Collier County commissioners in mid-December to allow officials to pay more than \$240,000 worth of impact fees over 10 years. The request came as church officials were looking for a way to open the doors to a new multipurpose building in time for the holidays.

The county uses impact fees — which normally are paid when a building permit is issued — to pay for growth-related projects, such as roads and parks.

While building has slowed in recent years, requests for payment plans don't happen often.

"Every now and then you'll get a request for payment plans, but most (fees) have to be paid at the issuance of the building permit," said Amy Patterson, the county's economic development manager.

But the New Hope building is in a different position than many new developments.

The church applied for a permit in 2006, and at the time the 41,913-square-foot building was expected to be an accessory to the main church. That accessory status meant the church didn't need to pay some impact fees on the new building.

Randy Johns, a representative with the engineering and construction company Phoenix Associates of South Florida, said the building was deemed an accessory because the church also planned to enlarge the sanctuary and the multipurpose building was only going to be used for overflow.

That continued to be the plan throughout the construction process but as it got close to issuing the certificate of occupancy church officials said they wouldn't be able to do the sanctuary expansion.

"Due to the economic turn down, we have not be able to fund it," Johns said during a Dec. 14 commission meeting.

Patterson said once the church informed the county staff of the change, the staff calculated impact fees for the building. The fees, Patterson said in an e-mail last week, come out to \$245,204.

That's when church officials decided to ask for help.

While there was no decision about a payment plan, commissioners did vote to discuss it at a later date.

They also decided to issue the church a temporary certificate of occupancy, allowing the church to open its doors in time for the holidays.

"We are just trying to get the building open," church administrator Pete Smith said.

Smith said he doesn't quite understand the issue, but said the church wasn't in the position to pay the full amount in one lump sum.

"Here's what I know at this time: We have an impact fee and we have 90 days to figure out what we're going to do," Smith said. "I don't know how that works, really. One way or another we have to do something."

Commissioners earlier this month said they were interested in looking at ways to help New Hope, and also the impact fee structure for nonprofit organizations as a whole. But at least one commissioner expressed concern about the ramifications of looking at the whole impact fee system.

"I don't know why we're going to take a look at making a policy for all nonprofit organizations when the real issue is there was a misunderstanding," Commissioner Tom Henning said. "I would rather see it as a special exception because of errors on both parts, and I think we need to deal with this issue and this issue only."

A payment plan is just one option when it comes to paying the impact fees. Patterson said the county does offer an impact fee deferral program for eligible charitable organizations.

That program allows charitable organizations to defer up to \$100,000 of impact fees for 10 years. That would leave New Hope Ministries with a \$140,000 tab to pay up front, and then allow the organization 10 years to save up the rest.

Patterson said the county is looking into whether New Hope would qualify for the deferral program.

While no date for a meeting between commissioners and church officials has been set, Patterson said the meeting needs to be scheduled before the temporary certificate of occupancy expires.

Smith said he isn't worried that the church will have to close the new building's doors.

"I believe in faith," he said. "Something's going to happen."

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