

Guest Opinion: Extending the Lee impact fee reduction is a good idea

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I support the Lee County Board of County Commissioners' decision to extend the reduction on impact fees.

To date, the reduction to impact fee initiative has jump-started development activity in Lee County and made a difference in investment dollars being captured here rather than elsewhere.

We work with clients daily in commercial real estate. The industrial market has started to come back, the retail market is seeing positive activity, but only along major corridors, and the office market is still struggling but with some activity in high profile locations.

The commercial market is behind the residential market in activity, but it's showing signs of improvement. It would be easy for developers to minimize their risk and wait until they were more confident that the commercial market was on the rebound before making an investment in new development.

The positive impact realized from the reduction of impact fees thus far should remain in place long enough for such benefit to span across all sectors of development, residentially and commercially. The ability to reduce overall project costs stemming from a reduction in impact fees along with other stimuli could aid in quicker action than would otherwise occur.

The reduced impact fee period has made a significant difference in how local, regional and national companies evaluate their risk for development in Lee County versus other areas within Florida and around the country.

If they are confident that the market will eventually rebound, and they can build at a lower cost now due to impact fee reductions, it encourages them to make the decision today, rather than tomorrow; and therefore, we are seeing projects coming out of the ground that would not have occurred without your action. Further, the added cost of impact fees can be a significant "make or break" component of project financing as developers strive to minimize budgets as low as possible to secure bank financing.

We have seen clients bypass other areas in favor of Lee County. The commissioners have made Lee County more competitive for both investment and job growth at a time when it is most needed. Raising fees on those responsible for the job creation would certainly negatively impact ongoing and future job creation.

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