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Hall board votes to delay collection of impact fees

Builders must pay when they apply for occupancy permit

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Hall County is changing the process for collecting impact fees.

The Board of Commissioners decided Monday to revise the impact fee ordinance, which would change the timeline for paying the fee. Instead of paying at the beginning of the construction process, builders would pay before obtaining a certificate of occupancy for the building.

"We've set up a dummy case in our system and tested it," said Randy Knighton, the county's planning director. "It will work. It can be done."

After listening to a presentation on Hall County's history of impact fees at their last meeting in April, commissioners decided to strike a compromise between placing a moratorium on impact fees through December 2012 and leaving them alone.

The change will go into effect June 1.

Following a 3-2 vote, with Commissioners Craig Lutz and Scott Gibbs opposed, county staff were directed to come to Monday's meeting with ideas about how to make the deferral effective.

"The impact fees can be paid up front, but if something goes awry, we've collected it, and it's in our coffers," Knighton told commissioners Monday. "Or they can pay after the final building inspection, and all department approvals must be completed before the certificate of occupancy is issued."

Hall County attorney Bill Blalock will draft a revision of the current ordinance, which commissioners will vote on later this month.

Impact fees are levied by local governments on new developments to offset public costs new residents may incur.

The fees, instituted in Hall in 2003, have pulled in more than \$5 million for the county to use on certain capital purchases. Fee collection dropped drastically in 2008 and 2009 as the housing market slumped, and remained dramatically low in 2010 and so far in 2011.

Lutz introduced the idea of halting impact fees in April after hearing

recommendations from the Home Builders Association of Gainesville-Hall County. He also said commissioners should contact Gainesville officials about lowering meter fees and tap fees associated with construction.

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