

HERNANDO IMPACT FEE DELAY ROUTES COUNTY TO ROAD CONGESTION

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The Hernando County Commission is fine with congested roads and welcomes them in the future as the county's population grows. That is the upshot of the commissioners' continued pandering to homebuilders by delaying reinstatement of impact fees. They need to reconsider lest existing residents realize they're being asked to carry the load for every newcomer.

With a 3-2 vote last week, the commission once again displayed a lack of leadership in planning for Hernando County's future by delaying for another year the return of impact fees to pay for road infrastructure. And even if the greatly reduced fees are put in place in August 2014 — just as voters go to the polls in a primary election — they will remain radically less than estimates of what each new home actually costs the county in infrastructure needs.

Diane Rowden appears to be the only commissioner who understands that every dollar not collected in impact fees ultimately shifts costs onto every other resident and increases the potential need to increase gasoline, sales or property taxes to pay for future roads.

On the other side was Commissioner Nick Nicholson, who rationalized his objection to even the delayed impact fees by saying the county's transportation network is just fine, thank you, because it's getting a \$26 million investment over the next two years.

But Nicholson and Commissioners David Russell, Wayne Dukes and Jim Adkins would better serve the public if they considered what won't be added to the Hernando road network. The county's five-year plan has \$104 million worth of projects that lack financing. And, the commission's three-year experiment to halve and then-eliminate impact fees has meant the county and Hernando School District had \$4 million less for capital construction.

Commissioners also should revisit the mathematics surrounding a recent local project — the widening of one mile of Elgin Boulevard that wrapped up a year ago this month. It carried a \$9 million price tag, unexpected and exorbitant right of way costs and required \$5 million in transportation impact fees to complete. The costs ballooned because poor planning in the past forced the county to acquire or move 30 homes from the route.

Apparently, a majority of the current commission isn't adverse to mimicking the same faux pas of inadequate road planning by currying favor with politically influential special interests. Despite protests to the contrary, the proposed impact fee ordinance would not kill new home sales. The modest fee of \$2,537 per single-family home is less than 30 percent of what people pay in portions of neighboring Pasco County and it is the equivalent of just \$7.05 of monthly principal on a 30-year mortgage. It's an overly generous discount of the true transportation costs of growth, calculated by a county-retained consultant at \$5,767 per single-family-home. Commissioners picked the cheaper fee last month after Russell opined an alternative "could stifle some of our growth." It's the same rhetoric regurgitated by the home builders last week even though no one documented that reduced impact fees serve as an effective economic stimulus.

Commissioners also heard that a trade-off for those less expensive fees is a diminished level of service on local roads. Waiving the fees entirely for another year moves the county from accepting more traffic congestion to endorsing it.

Hernando impact fee delay routes county to road congestion 04/27/13 [Last modified: Thursday, April 25, 2013 2:40pm]