

Impact fee moratorium pushback begins – Polk Commission Watch - The Lakeland Ledger - Lakeland, FL - Archive

The politics is becoming a little more interesting as the County Commission heads for next Wednesday's vote on a one-year impact fee moratorium for everything but school impact fees.

Earlier this year, the only voices in the debate appeared to be the Polk County Builders Association, who are perennial opponents of impact fees anyway.

What's been happening in the past couple of weeks, though, has been some pushback from the public.

Commissioner Ed Smith told me he had someone corner him at the grocery store to complain about his advocacy for the moratorium. Smith and Commissioner Sam Johnson have been the two strongest advocates for eliminating impact fees, arguing, absent any data really, that doing so will somehow create jobs or some other economic activity.

I've also noticed a spattering of e-mails coming to commission offices from impact fee moratorium opponents.

Which brings me to the latest turn in the politics.

We received a tip this week that Commissioner Smith had been counseled by County Attorney Michael Craig about an e-mail he sent to other commissioners in advocacy of the moratorium. When I did some checking, Smith admitted Craig had talked to him. The incident involved an e-mail he had received from a pro-moratorium advocate, Lakeland lawyer Robert Stanz, and forwarded to his colleagues.

The purpose of the tip, of course, was to cast moratorium advocates like Smith in a bad light, implying they were naughty behind the scenes.

Actually, when I did a little more checking, I found that as long as a commissioner is doing nothing more than passing along info and not trying to engage colleagues in discussion or seeking to initiate some kind of consensus-building out of sight of the public, what Smith did was probably no big deal.

However, in the political world, appearances count for more than facts and Craig, who is a careful lawyer, was correct to step in when he did. He's done it before in other instances. That's his job.

As I noted in an earlier post, Wednesday afternoon may be interesting.

Commissioners are poised to:

–Eliminate impact fees for a year to help developers.

–Grant the first exemption I can recall in the public service tax to benefit a specific industry, which supplies materials for the development industry.

–Consider rate increases for the next five years for county water and sewer customers to raise money to increase capacity in the utility system to accommodate more development.

Does anyone else see a theme here?