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Impact fee suspension proposed

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Could suspending impact fees for a year jump-start growth in Pasco County?

Commissioner Ted Schrader thinks it might. On Tuesday, he proposed suspending fees for parks, fire services and libraries for the 2010-11 budget year, which starts Oct. 1.

Suspending those fees would cut about \$1,400 off the cost of a new home, which now includes around \$21,000 in county and school impact fees. About half of that total is transportation impact fees, which pay for road construction. Those wouldn't be suspended.

Schrader argued that suspending the fees was a better option than collecting them when the cash-strapped county lacks the staff to run new facilities.

"Philosophically, I can't justify continuing to take their money," Schrader said.

Schrader argued that Hernando and Polk counties have taken similar steps. But he conceded it's too early to tell if the changes have spurred growth there.

Schrader's proposal met with skepticism.

"I don't know if \$1,400 makes a difference," Chairwoman Pat Mulieri said.

"It all adds up," Schrader said. "We're continuing to collect fees only to sit on them."

Under state law, the county must return impact fees it collects but doesn't use. But the law doesn't set a deadline for using the money, and the county has never returned any impact fees.

County officials are reworking the way they levy impact fees with any eye toward lowering fees in areas where the county wants to encourage growth and raising them to suppress development elsewhere.

Schrader asked commissioners to consider his proposal at a future workshop.