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Impact fee waiver approved by council

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A change of use impact fee waiver was unanimously approved by the Cape Coral City Council Monday night, a move the board hopes will spark some much needed economic development and fill the thousands of square feet of empty commercial space throughout the city.

The waiver only applies to change of use for existing structures, including restaurant, office, medical and retail facilities, and has a sunset date of Sept 1, 2012. City Council can also adjust that sunset date at any time.

Similar ordinances are already in place in Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, unincorporated Lee County and Collier County.

Without the Cape having a similar ordinance, Councilmember Kevin McGrail said the city has lost out on number of businesses that wanted to relocate here, specifically citing several medical offices that went to Fort Myers and Collier County.

"This boils down to this being our statement to the business community that we want to remain competitive," McGrail said. "This is our council's opportunity to keep our city competitive."

Councilmember Chris Chulakes-Leetz said the waiver may "harm certain individuals" down the road, adding that City Manager Gary King might have to make salary reductions during budget time to offset the waivers if the ordinance proves successful, despite the waiver only effecting road impact fees.

"Lets make sure we're clear about the truth ... we're giving up revenue and when we give up revenue we might not get it back," he said.

Of course, new road construction could suffer if the change of use waiver proves wildly successful, according to Councilmember Bill Deile.

"It's the roads that are going to suffer," Deile said. "We shouldn't look to squeeze the general fund, we've done this with our eyes open."

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