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Lake County school board votes to bring back impact fees

LAKE COUNTY, Fla.

Lake County school board members on Monday approved bringing back impact fees.

Channel 9 has learned that in the past three years, schools have missed out on millions because those fees weren't collected, but some say they won't help much now.

The impact fee is an extra fee of about \$2,500 on every new home, raising about \$3 million a year. But district officials said the new schools they need to build would cost \$240 million and total unfunded capital projects is nearing \$1 billion.

Home construction is once again on the rise in Lake County, and the school board wants a piece of the action.

"Fifty percent of all our elementary schools are 50 years old or more. So we have got to put something in place now," said school board member Rossanne Brandeburg.

At Monday's meeting, the board agreed to collect impact fees that are charged every time a new home is built. When the economy went south, the school district stopped collecting the fees and lost out on more than \$20 million over the last three years. But now, members say the school system needs the money to add onto existing schools and build new ones.

It's a decision that may not sit well with the local construction industry, but the board did decide to collect the fees at a rate much lower than advised by a district consultant.

And board chair Kyleen Fischer does not want the rate to go up until unemployment goes down. Fischer said too many parents are still losing their jobs.

"And then all the homeless children that we have, and the new homeless camps that are popping up all over Lake County, those homeless camps have children living in them," Fischer said.

The Lake County Commission has the final say on whether to reinstate the impact fees. They are expected to approve it.

