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Editorial: Lee impact fees need full review

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Lee County commissioners moved in the right direction Tuesday by reducing county road impact fees for new medical office space, but they need to review their whole impact fee structure.

The fees are one-time charges designed to help pay for the impact of new construction on public service infrastructure such as roads, schools, fire and EMS service and parks.

They make less sense when there's little growth, which is why the fees need to be adjustable to reflect the state of the construction business.

While the fees are intended to charge a fair assessment for impacts on county services, finding balance has been a challenge.

In the past, the county received criticism for keeping impact fees too low, and when commissioners increased the fees they were criticized as too high.

The fees, however, should reflect changes in infrastructure costs, which have dropped as the economy has suffered.

Collier County and Bonita Springs have made more sweeping impact fee reductions, as have other Florida counties. There's little evidence so far that cutting or eliminating the fees will do much to stimulate building in a moribund market, but it could help in some cases.

The commissioners action Tuesday can save property owners thousands on new medical offices in Lee County, which should provide some inducement in one of the few growth areas of the economy.

Commissioner John Manning's call for an across-the-board cut in fees received no support. Instead commissioners will pay for a study to determine whether road impact fees should be lowered.

They ought to conduct a thorough review of the whole impact fee structure.

[Lee Impact Fees](#)

• Previous impact fees to build an 11,000-square-foot medical office building:

Roads: \$244,000

EMS: \$660

Fire (Estero): \$1,990

Total: \$246,650

• New Costs:

Roads: \$74,000

EMS: \$660

Fire (Estero): \$1,990

Total: \$76,650

— SOURCE: Lee County

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