

Lee County's quality of life will suffer with impact fee freeze

Written by Frank Mann Sr.

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Frank Mann

Zoom

Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann Sr. First elected to the commission in 2006. Re-elected in 2008.

There's no such thing as a free lunch. And there's no such thing as "free impact fees."

Put simply, if impact fees, paid for by new residents for the most part, don't pay for the new schools, parks, roads, firehouses, and ambulances required when all these folks arrive here, then the existing local taxpayers will foot the bill, or we will go without.

The resulting packed roads, overcrowded classrooms, slow response time on emergency calls, etc., will collectively produce a huge negative impact on our quality of life.

Government leaders will need to determine another revenue source, so says The News-Press. ("A time for fees, and a time for free," Jan. 15.)

Folks, impact fees ARE that other revenue source, implemented about 20 years ago when the present residents got tired of paying for the needed infrastructure to accommodate all these new arrivals. It was called, appropriately, "growth paying for growth."

Impact fees have worked well, and we have miles of needed road lanes, and hundreds of needed classrooms, all paid for by the newcomers. Yes, the building industry hates them, and blames them for the present work slowdown. That of course totally ignores the fact that there is a nationwide recession, from which we are just starting to recover. And that recession hit Lee County harder than most places in the entire nation.

It also ignores basic economics of supply and demand. An outcome of the recession is that over 45,000 foreclosures have been filed since 2008, and most of those homes are back on the market at ONE HALF the cost of a newly constructed home. Who's going to buy a brand new home at \$200,000 when they can buy the exact duplicate as a foreclosure sale for \$100,000?

And suspending the fee will have zero effect on the issuance of new building permits.

Ironically, when impact fees here were at their all-time high, more building permits were issued than ever before. At that time there was mortgage money galore, and plenty of buyers.

Another irony in suspending impact fees is that the loans against our general revenue reserves (used to quickly fund badly needed road projects a decade back) will not get repaid (we pledged future impact fees for repayment) and our reserve fund will be worse off than ever.

That fund has already taken a \$100 million hit, and we're fast running out of reserves altogether. For all the talk from politicians about stopping the drain on our precious savings, this is a giant leap in the wrong direction. Suspending impact fees is just one more example of using a simple solution to cure a complex problem, which is ALWAYS wrong.

Citizens, it's your quality of life about to be hurt. Let yourselves be heard.