

Missed impact

By **BRIAN WALKER/Staff writer** | Posted: **Thursday, October 4, 2012 12:00 am**

The Mica-Kidd Island Fire District figured it would have about \$50,000 from impact fees to apply toward a new station by now, but it turns out nothing was collected.

That's because an agreement signed by the fire district board about a year ago never made it to the county commissioners for approval as it should have been to start the fee collection.

MKI Chief Jason Blubaum said the agreement - signed by the board prior to him getting hired by the district - was filed to the county's Community Development Department, not with the commission.

Community Development Director Scott Clark said, for whatever reason, the agreement didn't make it from his department to the commissioners.

The fire district and county department both claim some responsibility, aren't pointing fingers and are calling it an unfortunate mishap at the expense of taxpayers.

"I should have been on the ball and taken more of an interest," Blubaum said, adding that it wasn't until other fire districts started receiving funds that he began to question where MKI's was.

Clark added: "I apologize to them for any misunderstandings."

Blubaum said that, to a rural department such as MKI that only has two paid employees and in need of two fire stations, losing out on \$50,000 is a big deal. And that comes on the heels of the district spending \$7,500 to participate in the impact fee study.

"We don't have the infrastructure that some other agencies do," Blubaum said.

MKI's fees would have been \$1,740 for residential buildings and 80 cents per square foot on commercial projects. Blubaum said his recommendation to his board is to sign a new agreement since some commissioners are new and get the fee process started as soon as possible.

Impact fees are a way for agencies to mitigate the impacts of growth. It's up to the individual fire and highway districts and other taxing agencies on whether to impose impact fees, which must be used specifically to help fund capital improvement projects within 10 years.

The county's Community Development Department collects the fees for agencies when a new permit in the county is issued. Most area cities also charge impact fees.

Clark and Blubaum said the overall sentiment from builders and taxing agencies alike is that impact fees are justified, but they need to be fair and reflect the impacts of each development. The current rate for commercial projects only takes square footage into account, not the type of use or cost of the development.

The impact fee advisory committee recently recommended to commissioners to temporarily suspend impact fees due to the economy, the possibility of builders taking their projects elsewhere and concerns over the current system. Some say the fees should be reduced because they were implemented when the county's projected growth rate was higher than it is now.

A public hearing on whether to suspend the fees has not been scheduled.

"I have never seen a bigger can of worms," said Larry Clark, a Northern Lakes fire commissioner who sits on the advisory committee. "A lot of gray areas and questions have come up, but we're hoping they can be worked out."