

Polk Impact-Fee Moratorium: Two Years, Nothing To Show

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The Polk County School Board held a joint meeting Thursday with the County Commission in the commission chamber in Bartow. The topic was the commission's moratorium on construction impact fees. Leave it to the educators to teach the commissioners a lesson or two.

The commission, which imposed its moratorium in 2010, in an unfounded effort to boost construction, may continue to block its impact fees for two more years, reported The Ledger's Tom Palmer in an article Friday. The School Board did not pass a moratorium in 2010 and continues to collect impact fees.

That situation did not deter County Commissioner Todd Dantzler, an opponent of impact fees, from asking how much the fees contribute to the School Board's budget.

About \$1.4 million, said Mark Grey, assistant superintendent of schools for business services.

That amount is down greatly from a peak of \$32 million, Grey said.

Assistant Superintendent for Support Services Fred Murphy said the money is used to replace portable classrooms with permanent buildings, and to expand and renovate schools to adjust for growth.

School Board member Debra Wright asked the county to explain how it evaluates the effect of its impact-fee moratorium — does it really stimulate construction growth?

NO SUPPORTING DATA

County Manager Jim Freeman said data are scarce.

"To some extent, it's anecdotal," he said. "I'm not sure there's a set of data that would answer that question."

There never were any data to support the moratorium when it was approved by the County Commission in 2010.

The 2010 moratorium was a follow-up and doubling of a 50 percent trial moratorium in 2009 that the county admitted did nothing to increase construction.

As the county said then, "Prior actions by the Board of County Commissioners in reducing impact fees across the board by up to 50 percent have not produced the necessary economic stimulus."

Similar schemes in other counties have proved equally worthless.

The County Commission should learn from the School Board and collect an impact fee to help pay for costs related to what little construction-related growth there is in Polk County.

None of this deterred Dantzler. He said the "only way out of the morass is to create growth."

If Dantzler, a real estate broker, really believes the impact-fee moratorium is a growth-producing act, it must benefit his sales income. If that is the case, morally, he should withdraw from the discussion as a conflict of interest.

If Dantzler continues to take part in impact-fee-moratorium discussions, assume that the impact-fee moratorium is producing nothing and is just as useless as ever.

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