

Proposed saloon gets hit with \$220,000 impact fee

By Carrie Wells

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The Evanoff family bought an old warehouse on McIntosh Road to turn it into a country western bar, but the project came to an abrupt halt when county staff tried to levy a \$220,000 impact fee on it.

The Evanoffs, who own several sports bars, a car wash and a putt-putt golf course, say the fees amounted to more than a third of the roughly \$600,000 they paid for the warehouse.

After the family filed a protest in June and revised their seating proposal from 180 seats down to 150 seats, county commissioners on Tuesday cut their impact fees to about \$50,000, less than a quarter of the original assessment.

““I wish I didn't need to take it to getting a lawyer, but we had to do what we had to do to protect ourselves,”” Mike Evanoff said after the commission's vote. ““We're trying to create something in Sarasota and hire a lot of people, try to help the economy out.””

The family's experience comes at a time when Sarasota County is putting development impact fees under the microscope.

County commissioners were trying to spur economic growth when they voted in January 2011 to cut the impact fees by two-thirds. But commissioners have learned in recent weeks that that vote may not have meant much, since the rates are still based on construction data from the height of the boom. So whether the fees are too high, too low or just right remains an open question.

A large portion of the \$220,000 fee for the White Buffalo Saloon hinged on whether the warehouse had been considered ““retail”” or ““industrial”” in the past.

““I'm hoping staff made a mistake, otherwise it would mean a similar situation would achieve a similar result, and I like to see these be even-handed,”” Commissioner Nora Patterson said.

Commissioners say they want to focus on redevelopment efforts to boost the local economy and are set to discuss impact fee rates again in a couple of weeks.

The situation with the White Buffalo Saloon could factor into that discussion.

The 11,500-square-foot building, near Ashton and McIntosh roads, had previously been an ASAP Rental store, but county staff said they could not find any records from when ASAP opened in the late 1990s indicating any impact fees had ever been paid.

The original \$220,000 fee was revised by staff to \$150,000 based on their estimate of what the previous owners would have paid.

The Evanoffs eliminated the 30 seats to reduce the fee to \$88,000, and protested another part of the assessment.

County commissioners upheld the family's protest, and ended up waiving another \$38,000.

