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Road to perdition

The city of Cape Coral is set to drive a stake through the heart of what's left of its building industry. That's no surprise, it's always demonized its economic driver.

Home builders, Realtors and — lift crossed fingers here — developers have always been easy targets for both the we-got-ours, now-go-away citizen minority and the what-can-we-tax-next political majority who found quick pickin's within the construction sector.

Well, the anti-growth proponents got what they wished for: Residential and commercial expansion are at a standstill. We're sure they are happy although we would wager steeply depressed home values and sunken stock portfolios have given some cause to pause.

It's full speed ahead, though, for the revenue ravenous bureaucrats — they're eyeballing the corpse while it's warm and twitching, thinking there might be a meal or two left.

Cape Coral City Council is set to consider hefty increases to its road impact fee levies Monday.

An increase of 150 percent is proposed for new homes, duplexes, apartment buildings and condominium units. The road impact fee assessed to new homes would jump from \$3,347 to \$8,352. Multi-family would see an increase from \$2,347 to \$5,857 per unit.

For commercial, the proposed hit is substantially higher — increases of 74 to 196 percent, depending on the type of building, are proposed.

Think the Cape needs a second movie theater? The city's impact fee for roads alone is proposed to go from \$8,369 per 1,000 square feet to \$14,586 per 1,000, a 74 percent increase.

Eyeing a fast-food franchise to replace a management job lost?

Fast food restaurants, which currently pay \$14,384 per 1,000 square feet for their "impact" to the city's transportation infrastructure are looking at an increase to \$41,250 per 1,000 square feet should they choose to build in Cape Coral. That's a 187 percent hike.

The city's economic development targets — businesses the taxpayer-funded Cape Coral Economic Development office is spending millions



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to attract — are not exempt from the increases proposed in the fee structure.

The fee for medical office buildings will jump 158 percent — from \$8,634 per 1,000 square feet to \$22,284 — if city council approves the increases as tendered. The fee for new banks also would go up 158 percent — from \$9,060 per 1,000 square feet to \$23,385.

And the road impact fee for industrial buildings is proposed to increase from \$2,310 per 1,000 square feet to \$5,762. That's a tab of \$57,620 for a small 10,000-square-foot plant; \$576,200 for a large 100,000-square-foot operation.

For road fees alone.

With home building at historic lows — only seven new home permits were pulled last month — and unemployment at 9 percent and rising, we'd ask what the city was thinking in even bringing this fee increase ordinance to the table.

But we already know. For many on the staff side, it's business as usual. Budget pinching? Raise taxes. Or fees. Or charges to use parks. Or to play Little League.

Meanwhile, don't cut pet projects or departments, especially those that sound good like the Economic Development Office. Keep spending the money, even if those increased taxes — excuse us, fees — will make the city an even tougher sell in a region that is at the epicenter of the country's housing collapse, even if neighboring communities are cutting fees to become more competitive to attract more jobs.

We urge council to reject these proposed increases 8-0.

Send staff, and the business community, a strong message that Cape Coral recognizes the economic challenges at hand and ahead. That this city is, in fact, pro-business and its economic development efforts are more than the plan du jour and pretty brochures.

Reject the proposal to increase impact fees at this time. It's the road to economic perdition.

— Breeze editorial





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