

The Daily Commercial

School Board agrees to suspend impact fees

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Any homes added to Lake County between this Friday and the end of September will not include thousands of dollars in impact fees.

At Monday night's regular meeting, the Lake County School Board unanimously approved a recommendation that the county commission suspend the collection of school impact fees for six months.

The county's governance structure gives the commission the authority to impose the impact fee, but the school board sets the amount. Under the current fee schedule approved by the school board on Dec. 11, 2007, single family residences pay \$9,324, multi-family dwellings \$5,689 and manufactured homes \$3,297.

The six month duration beginning April 1 was settled on after much discussion. Initially, the commission was looking to make the timeframe retroactive to Feb. 15 to benefit builders who have already pulled permits, but school board members were split on the potential limitations imposed by the retroactivity. So, the board also considered suspending the impact fees for 12 months retroactive to February or six months from the start of the new quarter on April 1.

"It really ought to be a year," school board member Jim Miller said. "Six months isn't enough time to take advantage of it."

"I think the six months gives people an impetus to go ahead and build," board member Tod Howard countered. "The board can always extend it another six months."

Local residents and business leaders also weighed in on the subject. While most agreed with the suspension, several also expressed the opinion that the fee was too high and detrimental to a local economy dependent on the construction industry.

"In my neighborhood, there's been a big sandlot sitting there waiting for construction," Lake County resident Paul Richardson told the board. "Maybe with a six month suspension it's going to jump-start building."

"The most important thing in Lake County now is putting our people back to work," Linda Nagle of the Homebuilders Association said. "One new single family home creates three full time jobs, adds to the revenue and adds to the tax base."

The initial six month suspension period will also give school officials time to allow for the completion of an impact-fee study that is currently underway.

The school board has set a meeting for Monday, June 6, to review the study and discuss if the impact fee suspension needs to be extended.

"I think the board is pursuing the right tactic at this point," board member Kyleen Fischer said. "We'll have a six month period to look at all the financials."

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