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### School board balks on study calling for impact fee hike

By Erica Rodriguez, Orlando Sentinel

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Lake County School Board wants more information on a study that suggests higher impact fees be charged to homebuilders.

The school district's impact fees have been suspended until next April, but the study is required every three years to prove the fees are reasonably tied to the costs of school growth.

This year's study suggests the fees should increase from the current \$9,324 charge for a single-family home to \$10,292.

The School Board already held two meetings centered on the report, but could not come to an agreement on what to do with its recommendations. Board member Rosanne Brandenburg said she wanted more information on the suggested amount before recommending the study to the County Commission that eventually sets the fee.

"I don't know if that's the right number," she said. "I honestly don't know what that number should be."

Other board members were in favor of passing on the study, along with the \$10,292 recommendation, onto the County Commission.

"They are focused on our economy, and will decide when and how much impact fees can be phased back in," said Jim Miller, board member. "It is their decision as to what the market will bear. We need them to be right."

During the last fee adoption in 2007, school board members and commissioners were fiercely divided on a proposal to make the fees the highest in the state and second-highest in the nation. A study then suggested the fee to be \$14,646, more than double the previous rate. Commissioners eventually approved the \$9,324 rate which does not include the costs of money that was borrowed for school construction.

Homebuilders are already speaking out against the 2011 study suggestion saying that higher fees will slow down new construction.

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"We are planning on doing whatever we can to avoid the over-collection of impact fees," said Andrew Nutt, president of the county Homebuilders Association.

But the school district is in dire need for whatever funds it can access after making up a \$7.5 million drop in its construction and improvements funds this year.

The district collected about \$3 million from the fees last year before the suspension. It was projecting to collect another \$3 million this year that would have been used to pay for any additions and renovations of school buildings.

The board will meet again to discuss the issue in the coming weeks.

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