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School district may seek impact fee hike

By [JENNIFER EDWARDS](#)
Created 02/02/2011 - 12:01am

The St. Johns County School District plans to seek an increase in the impact fees it gets for new houses constructed in the county to help pay the cost of new schools.

During a workshop session Tuesday, the School Board discussed seeking a nearly 41 percent increase in those fees, which only apply to residential construction.

The funds would be use to build and expand schools and to accommodate new students coming into the system, said Nicole Cubbedge, district director for facilities planning and growth management.

"I think the facts show that this increase is needed to bring the school impact fee up to what it currently costs the school district" to absorb new families, she said.

"There are costs associated with absorbing people who live into that house into the road system, the school system, the park system, the fire system, the EMS system."

Margie Davidson, district spokeswoman, said Superintendent Joe Joyner would likely ask the school board on Feb. 10 to make the request to the County Commission, which must OK the increase.

If approved, the hike amounts to a \$3,396 bill for new residential buildings 1,800 square feet and under, up from the current \$2,413 charged now.

For residential buildings over 1800 square feet, that spells a \$5,779 bill, up from about \$4,105 currently.

County impact fees -- charged on roads, parks, fire protection, law enforcement and public buildings -- will essentially remain at their current level. For a new home containing less than 1,800 square feet, the county fee is \$4,863. For a house larger than that, it's \$6,017.

That would bring the total impact fees on a home of less than 1,800 square feet to \$8,259 and to a home of more than 1,800 square feet to \$11,796.

Cubbedge said deep cuts in state capital funding combined with less property tax revenue make an increase necessary, as does a county ordinance that requires new calculations every five years.

But County Commissioner Ken Bryan said he hoped the school board would come to the table willing to negotiate such a big increase.

"That's why we have a joint meeting (with the district), so we all have a full understanding of where we are," he said.

"I'm hoping they don't come back too high ..." he said. "Nobody wants a higher tax bill."

The next school board meeting will be at 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 10, at the administration building at 40 Orange Street.

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Peter Guinta contributed to this article

In a nutshell:

- * The school district will likely ask for a 40.8 percent increase on the impact fees it collects for new residential construction.
- * The funds are used to offset the cost of absorbing new students into the school system as a result of new construction.
- * District staff says the increase is necessary because of drastic cuts in state capital funding and a decrease in the county property taxes it collects.
- * At the same time, county commissioners are working to lower impact fees the county charges on new construction in the hopes of attracting new businesses, more commercial growth and more jobs.

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