

St. Lucie County may hike impact fees on new houses by \$3,000

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY — The impact fee for the developer on a new single-family home in mainland St. Lucie County — a cost often passed on to the customer — could be rising by almost \$3,000 on April 1.

Impact fees are taxes designed to pay for the demands on parks, public buildings, law enforcement, fire protection, libraries and schools that new developments create. The fees provide the county a way to pay for such growth without taxing every household in the county.

County Commissioners are slated to discuss the fees Tuesday. If they agree to them, the fees would go up from \$9,601 to \$12,582 beginning April 1, 2010. County officials say the county is updating its data from 2000-01, resulting in higher fees. The fees were last revised in 2005.

But the proposed increase comes at a time when builders are struggling to make a profit, former Treasure Coast Builders Association President Don Santos said. The increases would come in park and road impacts, while public building impacts would drop.

Some disagree as to how much of the fee will get passed onto new home purchasers, but Santos said consumers will pick up the entire tab since the housing market has eliminated the profit margin for builders.

"It's just a cost and an expense, and it's passed on to the consumers," Santos said.

Martin and Indian River counties have voted to temporarily suspend the collection of some impact fees as a way to stimulate the depressed construction sector.

St. Lucie County Commissioner Charles Grande said the county decided against freezing impact fee collections because the hold would not eliminate the need for the money and the freeze would force the county to collect the money from current residents.

"We looked at the possibility, but the consequences of suspending impact fees far outweighed any possible benefits," Grande said.

The county, which has used impact fees since 1986, is required to use the most recent and localized data, according to consultant James Nicholas.

The county uses data such as population and expected trips to determine how much to charge for commercial and real-estate development.

SOME FEES MAY CHANGE

St. Lucie County Commissioners will have the first of two public hearings on impact fee increases to developers at 6 p.m. Tuesday in the county chambers at 2300 Virginia Ave., Fort Pierce.

Here's a look at fees that might change and how they compare to neighboring counties.

Park fees

Current St. Lucie County park fees: \$515

Proposed St. Lucie County park fees: \$1,443

Indian River County park fees: \$1,463

Martin County park fees: \$2,345

Road fees

Current St. Lucie County road fees: \$2,324

Proposed St. Lucie County road fees: \$4,452

Indian River County road fees: \$5,202

Martin County road fees: \$2,891

Building fees

Current St. Lucie County public building fees: \$392

Proposed St. Lucie County public building fees: \$317

Indian River County public building fees: \$206

Martin County public building fees: \$436

Source: County consultant James Nicholas

Note: Martin and Indian River County Commissioners have voted to temporarily suspend some impact fees.



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