

## OTHER VOICES

### What happened to the fiscal conservatives we elected?

By Douglas Shearer, Special to the Star-Banner

Published: Sunday, June 17, 2012

All of our Republican county commissioners ran as fiscal conservatives, which to me means they want balanced budgets. So how, in the same meeting, do they pass a balanced Transportation Improvement Plan budget for fiscal year 2012-13 and then less than an hour later cut \$783,000 in revenue needed to fund that balanced budget?

They also voted to cut \$1.6 million in revenue from fiscal year 2013-14.

These budgets were balanced by projected income from transportation impact fees which, after accepting the TIP, they voted to do away with it for the calendar year of 2013.

We complain about the federal government not living within its means, but our county is doing so at just as fast a rate. We are depleting revenues set aside for necessary projects and emergencies to do projects that are far from necessary.

In Impact Fee Area 2, next year they voted to spend \$1.65 million on projects. But without impact fees, this will use up all reserve funds and leave us \$42,000 in the hole.

In Impact Fee Area 3, they voted to spend \$1.1 million on projects with reserves of slightly less than \$900,000. This leaves a deficit of almost \$200,000.

In Impact Fee Area 4, they approved \$3.8 million in projects, and with no impact fees coming in it will have a \$300,000-plus shortfall and use up all the \$3.5 million in reserves.

These commissioners have been watching Washington way too much. To wipe out all of our reverse road construction funds in one year would be bad enough, but to leave us deficits is crazy. Even Tallahassee doesn't flip-flop quite this fast.

Our road funding needs major priority changes. We have already used bond money — funded by the collection of future gas taxes — to build roads and buy rights of way. The problem is we are using more efficient cars and driving less, so less gas tax revenue is being generated. We need to focus only the necessary projects at this time, until the economy will support impact fees, or mobility fees, to pay for new roads that will not totally drain our reserves.

And study closely what we are spending money on. For example, commissioners approved an intersection improvement at Southwest 20th Avenue and County Road 484. The residents of Summer Glen deserve a safer way to get out onto 484, but this is not the answer. Several years ago, the county discussed a better way to improve this problem by extending the road behind Pilot another quarter-mile to the west then bringing it out onto 484. This would be on the top of the knoll and provide much better line of sight for the intersection and be far enough from I-75 to provide better traffic flow.

It would cost more, but it would be money better spent. Better long-range solutions save money in the long run. The problem with present county management is there is very little long-range vision.

The approved project at Southwest 49th Avenue and 103rd Street Road of adding turn lanes is not needed at this time and will be wasted money when 49th is four-laned in the future.

Adopting a few long-term solutions now and not so many short-term solutions that will be wasted money in the future is the smart and fiscally conservative thing to do. Let us demand more of our elected officials; make them follow the lessons of this recession. Keep some money in reserve and spend money wisely.

It was Commissioner Stan McClain who brought up the suspension of impact fees for next year — even though the issue wasn't on the agenda — and quickly moved to extend the impact fee moratorium through Dec. 31, 2013. This was quickly seconded by Commissioner Carl Zalak, and it passed unanimously. There was no place for public comment and no time for the commission to consider what this did to their budget, unless they knew it was coming up without it being noticed.

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