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Hernando school board recommends reinstating impact fees

By [MATT REINIG](#)

BROOKSVILLE - The Hernando County School Board is recommending that the county reinstate education impact fees, which could raise the cost of a new home by several thousand dollars.

A moratorium on the fees, which help the school district pay for infrastructure and pay down debt, has been in place for two years.

Since the moratorium was passed, the district has lost \$2 million in funding, said Roland Bovota, director of facilities for the district.

"There isn't a lot of opportunity for us to receive funds for the schools," said board member Dianne Bonfield said. "As far as the school district goes, as soon as a family moves into a house, those children impact the schools, or they should the very next day, because those children go to school immediately."

But not all were in favor of reinstating the fees. The board voted 3-2 last week to approve the impact fee study and recommend county commissioners adopt the fees with board member Gus Guadagnino and board chairman Matt Foreman opposed.

Guadagnino said the county has not experienced a significant enough increase in student enrollment to justify multi-million dollar renovation projects for several schools in the district, slated to begin in the next seven years.

"To me that's pie in the sky," he said. "The only thing I can go by is the history of our growth patterns."

The education impact fee study, which involved updated property data and appraisals, showed the maximum fee amount as \$6,988 for a residential single family home, \$5,879 for a residential multi-family home or condominium, \$940 for a residential mobile home within a mobile home park and \$5,831 for a residential mobile home in a private lot.

If county commissioners decided to reinstate impact fees they would not go into effect for several months.

That's a big if, said Foreman, who believes commissioners would not approve an impact fee of nearly \$7,000 for a single-family residence.

"The number needs to be reasonable, and something the county commission is likely to adopt," he said. "When you look from county-to-county it may seem palatable, but you also have to look at your audience."

"Quite frankly, your audience is the county commission."

But Bonfield viewed commissioners' decision to help fund the education impact fee study as a point of optimism for its approval.

"This is probably one of the most important decisions we have to make," she said. "I would like to see us send on to the (county) commission that we would like to see as much money as the report says we can collect."

Board member John Sweeney called education impact fees a catch-22: he does not like increasing costs of living, but said improving the education system is critical for economic growth and development.

Bavota said the school district is in debt and that education impact fees would be used to help pay off that debt.

"I think there's a lot more renovation, and remodeling and roofing that needs to be done, and that money needs to come from the half-cent sales tax," said Bavota. "Whereas impact fees are very, very restrictive."

Education impact fees are only collected in instances of growth and development, he added.

"If the builders don't build and there is no growth, you don't collect any impact fees," Bavota said. "I know it's tough, but the impact fees are so important for growth."

"And growth is connected to jobs," board member Gus Guadagnino replied. "If people are going to invest in this county, they have to look at the costs of coming to this county." County commissioners will review the board's recommendation at a later date.

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