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Bradenton City Council suspends impact fees for a year

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BRADENTON — The city council suspended impact fees for one year, hoping to stimulate construction and create jobs.

Tim Polk, director of the city planning and community development department, told the council before three votes Wednesday night that the various impact fees have been in effect for only two to five years and were initiated as part of The Accord, an agreement between the municipalities and Manatee County, to help equalize impact fees in the annexation process.

Impact fees are charged to builders to offset the cost of providing services for parks, roads and public safety for new construction. The costs are passed along to home buyers.

The city also has a sewer and water impact fee, but it was not part of the moratorium.

Any builder that applies for a permit between April 1 and April 1, 2010, will be exempt from paying the roads, parks and public safety impact fees.

Construction must begin within 30 days of the permit being issued.

Councilman Patrick Roff said the moratorium is for only one year and can be revisited.

For Councilman Bemis Smith, who is in the construction business, impact fees were not necessary.

Smith said the funds go toward paying for growth, but the city has not had any increase in population.

"Even in the heyday (of the building boom) we were having a hard time finding ways to spend the money," he said.

Councilman Harold Byrd said he believes in today's economy the council has to do things it normally would not do.

"I have to support this if there's an opportunity to bring jobs to Bradenton," Byrd said. "We have to give it a try."

Councilwoman Marianne Barnebey was the only dissenting vote on the three separate ordinances. She said her constituents have told her that they want development to pay its way.

"I'm the only one here not seeing this as a nirvana or savior as everyone thinks it's going to be," Barnebey said. "I don't think it going to launch economic growth like a rocket."

No one from the public spoke in favor or against the suspensions, but City Clerk Carl Callahan said he received a letter

from Ernest "Sandy" Marshall, president of the Federation of Manatee County Community Associations.

Marshall wrote that his organization voted unanimously to oppose any suspension or lowering of impact fees.

"Lowering or suspending impact fees will not cause purchasers to purchase a unit of property, if purchasers cannot borrow money, or have no money, or have no job, or income, to pay for such purchase," the letter read.

"Accordingly, lowering or suspending impact fees will not stimulate the economy," the letter continued. "To the contrary, all it will do is force the taxpayers to pay more taxes because of growth and because of the loss of impact fees while the developers make more profit."

In other business Wednesday, the council approved the application to the Florida Department of Community Affairs for a \$2.6 million federal grant.

The Neighborhood Stabilization Program grant, part of the federal Housing and Economic Recovery Act, provides funding for the city to purchase homes in foreclosure, renovate and resell them.

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