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Business leaders seek impact fee help to counteract slow housing market

By LARRY HANNAN

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With the slump in the housing market showing no sign of ending, the Naples Area Chamber of Commerce will be asking county commissioners for help today.

Commissioners will be asked during their meeting to delay increasing impact fees for about six months beginning in January 2008.

Impact fees, which are onetime charges on new construction, are scheduled to increase in January.

In a letter to Commissioner Tom Henning, Chamber President Michael Reagen has said the delay may benefit the current struggling building industry and provide incentive for the county's struggling economy.

"The scheduled impact fee increase will place additional burdens on a challenged market," Reagen said in his letter. "The ripple effects of our stressed out local economy have affected businesses of all types in the community."

The high cost of impact fees in Collier has been a frequent source of frustration to the chamber and the Collier Building Industry Association.

The county's policy is to keep impact fees at the highest level that can be justified by law, with updates every two years that increase the impact fees.

County officials argue impact fees need to be high to deal with the growth Collier has seen over the last decade. The county has one of the highest impact fee rates in the state, and conversely, one of the lowest property tax rates in the state.

However, because of the high cost of land, property taxes are higher than in other parts of the state even while the county's property tax rate is among the lowest.

Today's meeting starts at 9 a.m. inside the commission chambers at the Collier County Government Center at the intersection of U.S. 41 East and Airport-Pulling Road in East Naples.

The agenda also calls for commissioners to:

****Consider a resolution that imposed a uniform policy on the inspection, examination and duplication of public records.**

There have been no costs to county staff, commissioners or members of advisory boards when they make requests for public records, but officials with the County Attorney's Office weren't sure if it was

proper not to charge for public records, and asked the commissioners for guidance.

In response, commissioners are expected to approve a resolution today that will specifically state there are no public records charges by the county if a local unit of government funded by property taxes agrees to not charge the county for any public records requests.

**Hear an update on the construction of the county's new emergency services center on Lely Cultural Parkway.

**Get further direction on how to proceed with hiring a new county attorney. The county has hired a consulting firm to help hire a new county attorney, and that firm is expected to have questions for the commissioners at today's meeting.

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