

Collier votes to freeze some impact fees

By I.M. STACKEL

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NAPLES — It was a bit confusing to all concerned, but if the plan works, Collier County's businesses could see a little more action.

The Collier County Commission suspended some impact fees for at least a two-year period for a building that has had a certificate of occupancy for at least five years.

Collier leaders approved a plan to limit increased impact fees to stimulate the economy.

By a vote of 4 to 1, with Commissioner Jim Coletta dissenting, commissioners adjusted fees until the economy can get back on its feet.

It won't apply to water and sewer impact fees, but a number of others, Collier leaders clarified later Tuesday afternoon.

There are more than 60 land uses on the impact fee schedule and each land use has its own rate.

Impact fees are paid upon issuance of a building permit for the use listed on the permit, said spokesman John Torre. This use may change once tenants are found, for example, general office to medical office.

If the new use is at a higher rate than the use paid for on the building permit, then payment is required for the amount of difference between the two rates.

"In other words, if a doctor decides to lease space in a general office building, that is considered a change of use (the doctor's office) ... and the doctor would be liable for paying the net increase in impact fees for his or her space," Torre said after talking to Amy Patterson, Collier's impact fee maven.

The staff recommendation is for a period of two years.

These "change of use" fees would not be assessed in a building that has had a Certificate of Occupancy for a minimum of five years.

Also the program is limited to changes within existing commercial buildings, for example tenant build-outs, tenant improvements, etc. Additions to existing buildings and demolition/replacement of buildings will not be eligible for this program.

"What this ordinance does is try to spur business....opening doors... (it's) good for public," said Commissioner Tom Henning.

What commissioners did was change the requirement of impact fee assessment when a building is used for a purpose other than originally planned.

However, Realtor Debbi Grant protested water and sewer impact fees, not impact fees in general, she said.

She said she lost two sales this year because of impact fees.

One was on a building that was zoned for medical and office use. Because they were changing the building to one doctor's office, the impact fee would have been \$80,000.

"We all know credit is very tight," she said. "To borrow \$80,000 for a change in impact fee is impossible."

Collier leaders asked for some kind of remedy because numerous mini-malls and office buildings have been sitting vacant.

Former fees were as follows: a general industrial building to be used in the future for general office space would cost an additional fee of \$11.77 per square foot. Make that change to retail, and the increase would be \$11.18 per square foot.

If a general office building were converted into a medical office, it would cost an additional \$27.60 per foot. Change a retail site to a high-turnover restaurant, and the increase is \$57.52 per square foot.

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