

Collier extends impact fee breaks to businesses moving into older buildings

By LAURA LAYDEN

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COLLIER COUNTY — Based on its popularity, Collier County government will continue to offer a program that promotes redevelopment by reducing the impact fees paid by businesses moving into older commercial buildings.

On Tuesday, county commissioners extended the program another year, until July 1 of next year. The vote was unanimous, with no debate.

“That was a good thing. It’s another way of trying to be more business friendly,” Commissioner Donna Fiala said by phone after the vote.

Commissioners first approved the program in March 2009. At the time, many older buildings had high vacancies and struggled to attract new tenants because of an economic downturn, and the cost of additional impact fees for changes of use only made it tougher to fill the empty spots.

Impact fees are charged on new construction to support roads, parks, schools and other community needs.

With the extension of the commercial redevelopment program, businesses moving into buildings that are at least three years old will continue to be exempt from paying more impact fees, with the exception of the impact fees that cover water and sewer services.

Interest in the program remains steady, with five new businesses recently qualifying to participate, and several others moving through the approval process.

Nearly 100 businesses have benefited from the program so far. It has saved businesses more than \$4.2 million in impact fees, according to a staff report.

The program has helped bring buildings that were sitting empty or mostly vacant “back to a useful life,” Fiala said.

After Tuesday’s unanimous vote to extend the program, Fiala suggested to commissioners that they look at more breaks on impact fees for public utilities, as an added enticement to promote business growth in the county. That debate will be left for another day.

“I think we could be a little creative as far as those utility fees go,” she said.



