

Collier freezes impact fees on some buildings to stimulate business

By I.M. STACKEL

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COLLIER COUNTY — In hopes of revitalizing Collier County's economy, commissioners on Tuesday froze impact fees for some buildings that are more than 5 years old.

Impact fees are imposed on developers and buyers, to offset environmental and traffic impacts in the area.

The freeze is for two years, but county staffers will report back to the commission on an interim basis, said Amy Patterson, the county's impact fee director.

The approval is a reiteration of last month's discussion, when commissioners agreed to freeze some impact fees for change-of-use properties.

That will get some business back into empty office buildings, said Chairwoman Donna Fiala.

It's a good program for blight prevention, said Commissioner Frank Halas.

There was some debate over the issue.

Commissioner Jim Coletta noted that some people who had already shelled out impact fees for a medical building in North Naples were not exactly delighted to hear that one could turn an old office building into a medical office, and not pay as much as they did.

Commissioner Fred Coyle said he saw Coletta's point, but that is the way of the world.

"What we're trying to do is stimulate the economy and get some of the older,

unoccupied buildings off of market," Coyle said. "Yes, some people are going to be hurt."

But Paul Sullivan of Marco Island told commissioners he fully supported the plan.

"One of the changes we've seen on Marco Island is a loss of doctors. We've had some doctors retire, some leave the area, a doctor who died, and new ones aren't coming," Sullivan said.

The plan passed 4 to 1, with Coletta dissenting.

Earlier in the day, commissioners decided to recalibrate how to calculate impact fees, accepting a recommendation from the county's Productivity Committee.

"It is important that impact fees reflect the actual costs of infrastructure development," said Coyle.

Building costs have declined dramatically over the past 18 months, and for that reason, impact fees should also decline, he said.

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