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## Commission likes new impact fee ordinance

Submitted by Robby Douglas on Tue, 02/01/2011 - 8:17pm.

The Citrus County Commission likes what's in the new impact fee ordinance that will take effect after June 1.

That's the date when a period of suspended transportation impact fees will end, and a new impact fee structure will then take effect once the county commission passes its new, amended impact fee ordinance.

The fees and ordinance were part of Tuesday's special workshop in Inverness held in the board's chambers. Advice as to what impact fees to charge were provided by Duncan Associates, a consulting firm specializing in impact fees.

No action was taken by the board, but there will be a 5:15 p.m. public hearing on Feb. 22 that will also be held before the commissioners make up their minds. Helping them along on Tuesday was the county staff, which recommended that fees for fire, police, EMS, libraries and public buildings be kept at the current 100 percent level recommended by Duncan Associates. For schools and roads, county staff recommended a level of 50 percent.

Commissioner J.J. Kenney said the new ordinance was a good first step, and Commissioner Joe Meek recommended the eventual adoption of the ordinance. Commissioner Winn Webb said he, like Meek, was on board with the 50 percent figure for schools. "I want to see the removal of RV slabs totally (for portables) removed from the schools. I don't want to see school impact fees on RV slabs."

Commissioners also discussed the possibility of allowing the payment of impact fees for commercial properties over time, and elimination of fees for change of use.

Impact fees is still a sore subject in Citrus County. During public comment, the Citrus County Builders Association had issues with the fees. CCBA spokesman Gaston Hall said the organization had issues with the data gathered by Duncan Associates. He also said the group favors a 7- to 10-year payment plan for impact fees, especially for smaller commercial projects.

"We support impact fees," Hall said. "Just keep us competitive with other counties."

But keeping competitive might be easier said than done. "They (other counties) aren't building, either," said Commissioner Winn Webb. "They're in the same boat we're in. Some of them are worse than we are. I don't think anything we do here today is going to turn anything around. All we're doing is positioning ourselves for the future. The school board is in the same situation."



Citrus County School Board member Pat Deutschman, left, speaks to county commissioners about impact fees



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For its part, the school board wants impact fees spread evenly. Citrus County School Board member Pat Deutschman told commissioners that impact fees were important to the school district for improvements. Issues of capacity and level of service surfaced by Duncan Associates were more complicated than they appear, she said.

As for capacity and surplus student workstations, Deutschman said, "It's not how many classrooms are empty, but how many students are in a classroom." She said level of service was also affected by the number of portables in use by the district, and were no substitute for regular classrooms.

"We want equity (in impact fees). Don't single out the school district," she said.

Other recommendations by Duncan Associates included the consolidation of land use categories, a tiered-fee option and tiered road fees. it was also recommended that RV park impact fees be eliminated, but that courtesy would not be extended to mobile home parks.

Other public comment included pleas to not decrease impact fees. One resident, Pat Wade, had a few choice words to say on the county's economic environment.

"The consultant said over and over that impact fees don't encourage development. Impact fees didn't cause this crisis. Overdevelopment did." Wade likened reduced impact fees to a bailout of the construction and developer communities. "And the void will be filled by taxpayers," she said.

At the end of the workshop, commissioners seemed to lean toward passage of the ordinance, but there will have to be more discussion and input from the public before Feb. 22.

In the final analysis, County Commission Chairman Dennis Damato believes that the county will have to change the way it does business.

"If you've lived around here for a long time, like I have, when it comes to these issues you have probably heard terms like 'This is Circus County' here, (and of Marion County) Slow-cala.' Why is that? It's because there's been a perception by the public for a long time that on fees, rules and regulations we may have been a little too Draconian."

Damato said the board is determined to change that perception - in everything the county does. "It's going to be done right because you have the right staff in place (and is) on the right track. You're going to see the Land Development Code made to fit this county like it never did before." Damato also said that determination includes encouraging economic development and impact fees that make sense.

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



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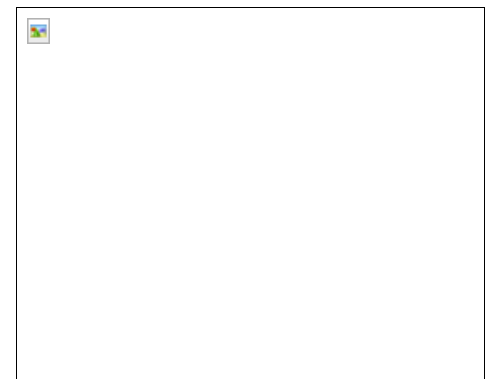
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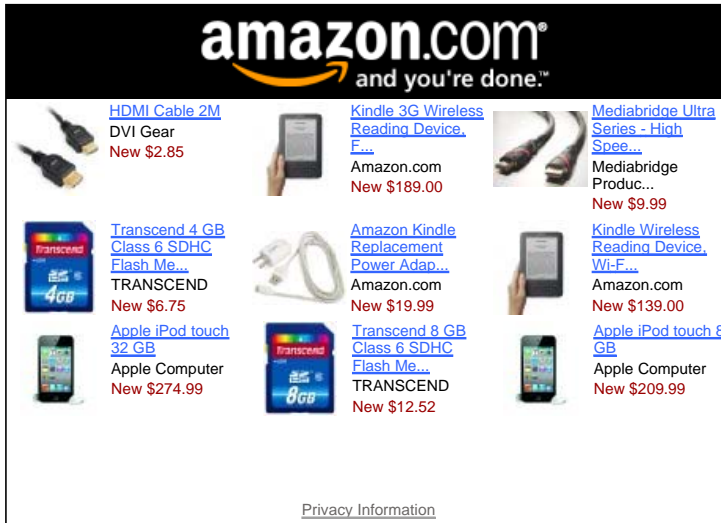
Are you willing to pay higher taxes for better fire protection?:

- No. Have you noticed the economy lately?
- Yes. It's going to cost, but improving fire protection will save lives.
- No. This is just kingdom-building, and will result in yet another bloated county budget
- Yes. The all-volunteer firefighter force can't withstand the compliance cost of strict new state requirements.
- I just don't know.

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A Homosassa Post Office worker was arrested on Jan. 27 following complaints from several postal patrons their property had been stolen or was missing.

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[Public Safety Initiative Task Force announces meeting dates, topics...](#)

Citrus County's new Public Safety Initiative Task Force, (PSITF) has announced tentative meeting dates and topics for its investigation into combining law enforcement, fire rescue and emergency medical services into one department under the Sheriff's Office.



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