

Construction in St. Johns County: Getting the message on impact fees

Posted: June 4, 2012 - 12:00am | **Updated:** June 4, 2012 - 6:29am

I found the Times-Union article on [the upward surge in increased building and home sales in St. Johns County](#) disingenuous.

It was unfair in its comparison to Duval County in that this "surge" took place when St. Johns County has only recently turned around an almost complete lockdown of building permits due to their inordinate impact fees.

During the building bubble years, Duval was one of the only counties in the state not to take advantage of impact fee revenue.

I was on the JCCI Recession and Economic Recovery Study that traveled the seven Northeast Florida counties in the fall of 2010.

The day we arrived at the St. Augustine Airport for the outreach forum to collect local input on St. Johns County, there was a large meeting room filled to capacity, primarily with business owners, builders, developers and real estate people.

We heard a tirade of frustration from these people attesting to the challenge of trying to pull permits and comply with St. Johns County building requirements.

I am associated with a St. Johns County builder who has operated there for more than 35 years. He said the county was nearly shut down on permitting.

To build commercially was a three ring circus. Going into an existing location with a new business could easily start at \$30,000 before plan review.

The final clincher is that unconsolidated St. Johns County has municipalities invoking their own restrictions.

Some were severe and unreasonable environmental hurdles.

The city of St. Augustine was especially egregious at charging for several added permitting layers, then creating an endless array of departments that had to overlap inspections.

For businesses, this culminated with the fire marshal who could take forever to even inspect a working restaurant kitchen range hood system.

These processes were in such disarray and disorganization that many businesses finally folded prior to ever getting to the point of opening, crushed by the unreasonable timetable of overlapping layered inspections.

St. Johns County should not be so smug now that they have finally given the building industry a modicum of relief..

It was either that or bankruptcy by edict of a tyrannical bureaucratic morass in the building sector.

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