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Consultant tells Martin County School Board $23 million for proposed school is reasonable

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Originally published 01:02 p.m., December 12, 2007
Updated 01:02 p.m., December 12, 2007

STUART — A consultant told the Martin County School Board that the estimated $23 million it's paying to build a new school in western Palm City appears reasonable.

At a workshop Wednesday about construction costs and impact fees, Praveen Ommi, with a Miami-based construction consulting firm, said the increases in costs from 2004 to 2007 is consistent with the increase in construction costs in South Florida.

However, some local business leaders and residents disagreed and said the costs should be going down.

For Elementary A -- the new school under construction west of Florida's Turnpike – the Martin County School District is using the design of J.D. Parker School of Science, Math and Technology, though some changes have been made for the new school.

Scott Watson criticized the School Board for hiring a consultant to review the construction costs.

"This money is being spent in an attempt to prove to the public that School District isn't wasting their money," Watson said. "Kind of an oxymoron."

Parker was completed in 2005 and cost about $18 million, the new school is estimated to cost about $23 million.

At 1:10 p.m. this afternoon, the Martin County School Board will continue the workshop and discuss impact fees. Impact fees are charged to developers to help pay for school construction and projects caused by the growing population.

In August, the School Board approved increasing the school impact fees on a new 2,000-square-foot house from $4,555 to $8,680, based on calculations from economic consultant James Nicholas. Nicholas will present the board with revised recommendations. For instance the proposed impact fee on on a new 2,000-square-foot house would increase from $4,555 to $5,567.

The County Commission also will need to approve any changes.