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## **County impact-fee stimulus could begin 3 months early**

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MANATEE — Manatee County could start an impact-fee reduction program aimed at stimulating local housing construction three months earlier than initially planned, a move that could cost it another \$1 million.

County commissioners on Tuesday told county attorneys to draft a proposed ordinance implementing the program with a Jan. 1 eligibility date, instead of April 1 as previously discussed.

"It's a very clean date," said Commissioner Donna Hayes, who joined Commissioner Carol Whitmore in advocating for the three-month advance.

The proposed two-year program would cut in half the transportation impact fee that the county charges on new residential construction. It would apply to homes whose building permits were pulled on or after Jan. 1 of this year but have not obtained their certificate of occupancy, and thus paid impact fees, until after July 1.

That would result in a \$4,000 impact fee reduction on a typical house, county officials said.

Combined with a proposed one-year suspension of school impact fees, builders would save about \$10,000 per house — about two-thirds of what they ordinarily would pay, County Administrator Ed Hunzeker said.

But it would cost the county in lost revenue: Hunzeker estimated it would be nearly \$13.7 million. By moving the eligibility date up by three months, the loss would grow to about \$14.7 million, he said.

That was too much for Commissioner Joe McClash, the only one who opposed directing the county attorney to prepare an ordinance.

"I really just prefer that this board stay where it's at," he said. "I don't think this is going to do anything to stimulate the economy."

McClash also cautioned there could be unintended consequences, such as overburdened roads, and that proposed legislation in Tallahassee could affect the county's proposed program.

But other commissioners said now was the time to act in order to spur job creation in construction, one of the county's top industries.

"This is our issue, not Tallahassee's," Hayes said. "This is something we have in our control to do, and we really need to do this."

Several developers sat in the meeting audience, but were largely quiet as only two addressed the commissioners.

"We think . . . it to be a good settlement," Pat Neal of Neal Communities said of the Jan. 1 date.

The county's planning commission likely will review the proposed ordinance at its May 14 meeting, with commissioners considering it for adoption after that, said William Clague, an assistance county attorney.

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