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County starts fee deferral for builders today

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Starting today, builders can voluntarily defer paying traffic, parks, drainage and sewer impact fees until they finish building their projects in unincorporated areas of the county.

County supervisors in March unanimously approved the plan, which will run through June 2011, to help the local building industry that has been hit hard by the recession.

The fee deferral plan was proposed by supervisors Bill Horn and Ron Roberts. Previously, builders have had to pay impact fees when they started building their projects, creating a debt they could not recover until the projects were finished and sold or occupied. Now they can put off paying those fees until they finish building. The fee deferral applies to builders of residential tract developments and commercial projects, and is a voluntary program. The program could save builders thousands of dollars in upfront fees and provide the financial boost to start projects they might otherwise delay.

"The impact fee deferral is an opportunity for the county to help our ailing economy and give relief to an industry that is struggling," Horn said. "We believe this kind of assistance will enable construction workers to keep their jobs and perhaps allow companies to hire more people."

Roberts concurred.

"Government should be making these kinds of simple changes that help local people through difficult times," Roberts said. "This industry in particular has taken a very hard hit and is floundering."

Officials from the San Diego County Building Industry Association have applauded the supervisors' action, saying it could help "prime that pump" and get people working again.