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Editorial: Impact fees

Road hikes make sense, while others could ride

Daily News staff

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With the Southwest Florida economy taking a pounding by the downturn in housing construction and sales, it is clear that this is not a time of business as usual.

Collier County commissioners this past week demonstrated they understand that, agreeing to a \$53 million deal with developers who are eager to get going rather than scale back. The centerpiece of the deal is beefing up the intersection of U.S. 41 East and Collier Boulevard. The development consortium of residential and commercial projects also will widen U.S. 41 two miles past Collier Boulevard to the east, an emerging growth area.

The builders group told the county they believe they can get the work done more quickly and cheaply than the county and its contractors. While we've seen some prior privatized public road construction projects in Collier, this one is big and comes at a time when growth in general and impact fees in particular are in the spotlight in another context. County commissioners the same day rejected a seemingly reasonable, sensible compromise on impact-fee increases slated to take effect with the new year.

Rather than set aside increases of impact fees for infrastructure items, such as parks, libraries and government buildings, and leave road impact fees go full speed ahead, the commission by a 3-2 vote went ahead with impact-fee hikes across the board.

We're glad the commissioners stood pat on the road impact fees. There is no getting around the need for roads, and this slow growth period might give our area a chance to catch up. Still, the bills keep coming.

But the need for parks, libraries and government buildings — especially more government buildings — is not in the same league. We wonder whether one new library, a proposed regional site at Lely Resort, might be able to wait a while. We wonder whether parks in the immediate future, if any are needed at all, can be kept simple — like green space rather than Disney World. Impact fees for additional government buildings are a self-fulfilling prophecy of even bigger government — supposedly a dreadful notion to an all-Republican board.

Those sentiments take on added meaning amid a housing market where developers will be looking to spare every price point they can.

Development industry representatives, while correct to ask commissioners for a break at this time, need to listen to part of the commissioners' angry message about what the development lobby in Tallahassee is doing to curtail local taxes and impact fees. The mission up there can be in conflict with the mission back home.

Still, on balance, commissioners ought to understand that this is a new day — not business as usual.

They got it on Collier/41 and missed it on impact fees, going for the whole pre-holiday feast rather than choosing a la carte.

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