

Commissioners debate impact fees, Main Street, library district

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County commissioners continued to debate impact fees and a maintenance agreement for Main Street during a Tuesday informal meeting.

Commissioner Susan Baird also threw the property tax rate of the Alachua County Library District into the mix.

On the impact fee issue, Commissioner Lee Pinkoson is working with staff to determine what effect a potential moratorium on impact fees would have on county coffers and the local construction industry. The county levies fees for park and fire station construction and, most significantly, roads. The Builders Association of North Central Florida has requested a moratorium on those fees to help move some construction projects along in the economic downturn.

Baird supported that move Tuesday, saying she would ““get rid of impact fees totally”” to help the building industry.

Commissioner Mike Byerly was skeptical- saying fees were in place so new development would pay for the infrastructure required to meet its needs. Byerly said that, without those fees, the ““cost of that infrastructure has to be picked up by the rest of the taxpaying public.””

On the issue of Main Street maintenance, commissioners continued a debate from last Tuesday, when they delayed a vote that would have the county taking over maintenance of a stretch of South Main Street from Williston Road to Depot Avenue. Years ago, the Florida Department of Transportation said the roadway no longer met standards as a state road because of the narrowing of a stretch of Main through downtown that county and city officials requested.

The county took over ownership of the stretch from Williston to University Avenue and had an arrangement with FDOT and Gainesville to take over maintenance of the segment from Williston to Depot. But no formal agreement was approved on the maintenance. When one came up last Tuesday, Pinkoson and Baird opposed using county gas tax monies to maintain a roadway within the Gainesville city limits.

After initially being told in 1999 that the city could not take over the road, the county was told in 2004 that the city could. At that time, commissioners voted 3-2 to move ahead with the arrangement to take over ownership and maintenance because Gainesville officials did not want to take over the road. Gainesville does maintain the stretch of Main from Depot north to Eighth Avenue.

Byerly questioned Tuesday if it was worth ““dredging up”” the issue again because it may create ““ill will”” with Gainesville officials, with whom the county has to negotiate on a slew of transportation issues. Those now include a potential November referendum on a sales tax for transportation projects.

County Attorney Dave Wagner said that, while a maintenance agreement with FDOT was not signed, the county did take over ownership years ago.

““We have an obligation to maintain property we own,”” Wagner said.

Also Tuesday, Baird raised the issue of the Library District, which was approved in a voter referendum in the 1980s. She questioned if taxpayers would be bound indefinitely to pay the property tax that funds the district because of that vote. Her goal, she said, was to trim the district’s budget.

On that issue again, Byerly and Baird had one of their frequent debates.

““You have to be on the Library Governing Board to make your argument and you didn’t want to be,”” Byerly said to Baird of the budget issue.

That Governing Board is comprised of two county commissioners, two Gainesville commissioners and a School Board member.

The Library District’s property tax rate is currently 1.479 mills- or almost \$1.50 for every \$1,000 of taxable property value.

