

Hiller questions if Collier staff properly accounting for impact fee payments

By LIZ FREEMAN

Monday, July 25, 2011

NAPLES — Collier Commissioner Georgia Hiller contends county government has some unpaid bills to the impact fee fund and she wants it resolved.

The tab could be as much as \$2.3 million for impact fee waivers over two years already awarded to 60 companies for commercial redevelopment.

The figure could reach \$3 million if a \$500,000 waiver goes through for Arthrex, a medical device manufacturing firm, for a redevelopment project at its Creekside Boulevard campus in North Naples, according to a report she prepared for commissioners.

At the commission's June 28 meeting, Hiller was the sole commissioner to vote against a package of economic incentives, including impact fee waivers, for Arthrex which pledges to create 600 jobs through the Creekside project and a new plant it would build in Ave Maria.

Her dissent was a slam to Arthrex, which was hoping for unanimous support for its proposed \$50-million capital investment.

At issue for the impact fee waivers for commercial redevelopment is a policy that county staff must transfer money from the general fund for county government operations to make the impact fee whole. That's to make sure new growth doesn't unfairly pay more than what it is supposed to for effects on roads, parks, utilities and the like.

Hiller contends the county hasn't been making the money transfers.

She is bringing the issue up at Tuesday's commission meeting and wants the commission to direct staff to calculate the extent to which the impact fee fund is owed money from the general fund.

From a broader perspective, it means the general fund has an "unfunded liability" that hasn't been accounted for in the budget, according to her report.

"There are other programs-transactions which will likely have the same adverse impact on the general fund and should be accounted for accordingly, for example; impact fee waivers granted developments by nonprofits," she wrote.

Commission Chairman Fred Coyle said Friday he has asked staff to give him a report on the issue. He also said he doesn't put much stock into what Hiller is saying.

The two commissioners have clashed for months.

"I just don't believe these kinds of errors have occurred, but if they have we need to fix it," he said.

When asked if the commission normally takes a second vote to approve a fund transfer after granting an impact fee waiver, Coyle said that should be the normal process.

"If we have failed to abide by our normal process, that is an internal auditing issue that needs to be resolved, but once again, I don't place a lot of confidence in what Hiller says," he said.

On another issue involving Arthrex, the commission is expected to vote on a map change request from Barron Collier Cos. to move 50 acres of commercial zoning that is presently designated along Camp Keais Road to a site on Oil Well Road in Ave Maria.

If the map change is approved, Barron Collier intends to donate 21 acres along Oil Well to Arthrex, which is considering building a manufacturing plant at the site that would create 150 new jobs.

Arthrex also is considering a Lee County location for the plant expansion and is expected to make a decision shortly.

__ Connect with Liz Freeman at www.naplesnews.com/staff/liz_freeman



© 2011 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online