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Habitat Layoffs

Ray Dorn

It was distressing to learn of the loss of jobs at Habitat for Humanity. Worse, the decision of the county commissioners to not fund \$500,000 presumably because the county doesn't have it, means the loss of \$1.54 million grant money that would have been spent in the community.

The county likely would have had the money had impact fees not been suspended sometime around July, 2009. From the report on Jan. 10 of the decline in building permits for 2009 and from the impact fees schedule in Highlands County Web site, I calculate roughly that the county lost over \$1 million in impact fee revenue because fees were suspended. Clearly the suspension did not stimulate new building.

The average cost of a single family build in 2009 was 3 percent higher than in 2006 at the peak of the real estate bubble.

All the above suggests to me several things had impact fees not been suspended:

1. Those who built after fees were suspended probably would have built anyway.
2. The county would have \$1.5 million more in the bank.
3. The Habitat for Humanity-Ridgeview project could have been funded to greatly benefit the community.
4. The county commissioners should reinstate the impact fees soon to preclude further revenue loss when new construction picks up as it will without impact fees when the market recovers.

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