



Impact Fees Get A 5% Raise

By [Gary Pinnell](#) of Highlands Today

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SEBRING — Going to build a new church? The impact fee has gone up another 5 percent, according to a new schedule released by the Highlands County building official's office. The charge is now \$1,528 per 1,000 square feet.

Last year, impact fees were adopted at 25 percent of the amount Highlands County commissioners plan to eventually charge on new homes and commercial buildings.

In September, the five board members decided not to raise impact fees for 2008, then changed their minds a week later and went to 30 percent.

The building official collected \$1,597,914 for the entire year of 2007, said Helen McKinney, assistant to Building Official S.Y. Moseley Jr.

Impact fees are charged to help counties and cities build libraries, schools, parks, roads and other facilities for new residents coming to the area.

Impact fee critics claimed in 2006 that no new restaurants would be built in Highlands County if impact fees were instituted, but Olive Garden's owners paid more than \$62,000 in impact fees. If Olive Garden had waited until the full 100 percent impact fees were in force, it would have paid \$250,000 in impact fees. Impact fees were not charged on the rest of Shelby Crossing, Plaza By The Mall and Liberty Plaza, however, because those projects were permitted before Dec. 31, 2006.

There is no impact fee for a residential swimming pool, a carport, a shed, or even a Florida room, said Carol Shackelford, permit clerk in Moseley's office.

"It's not occupied square footage," she said.

If a screened-in porch is being converted into a glassed-in porch, and the windows are removable, there's no impact fee, Shackelford said. If the windows are permanent, an impact can be charged.

If a homeowner wants to add on living area, there's no impact fee unless the square footage of the house increases enough to move into a new category. A single family home with less than 1,500 square feet pays an impact fee of \$5,070. Between 1,500 and 2,499 square feet, the impact fee is \$6,033. Over 2,500 square feet the impact grows to \$6,731.

Impact fees are reduced if an existing home or a restaurant is torn down and replaced with a similar structure, Shackelford said.

For instance, if the old Barnhill's Buffet is torn down and replaced with a new, larger restaurant, the fee is \$13,992 per thousand additional square foot.

Impact fees are charged in eight categories. For instance, a multi-family duplex or apartment is charged

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\$122.46, which goes to corrections, \$49.05 for law enforcement, \$149.62 for fire and rescue, \$13,87 for EMS, \$53.09 for library, \$180.93 for parks and recreation, \$1,968.50 for schools and \$972.30 for transportation. The total impact fee is \$3,799.18 per unit.

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