



Without Impact Fees, Who Pays For Growth?

Highlands Today Staff

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Highlands County is in a Catch 22 when it comes to impact fees. County commissioners appointed a committee to consider whether to lift the fees and other costs to building houses and commercial property, but it will be months before anything is decided. In the meantime, with the possibility of fees being lifted, what little building that was going on has ground to a halt, according to one builder, because why pay now if the fees will be lifted? It's a tough situation, and it appears that some people forget the basic idea behind impact fees.

The reason impact fees were implemented was to protect current residents from having to pay for infrastructure that new building projects will bring. The fees were to protect people already living here from the added taxes they would have to pay when more people move here and clog our roads, schools, etc.

It wasn't just out of the kindness of anyone's heart that the fees were implemented, though. Actually, the state requires that before it approves development, money must be made available to provide infrastructure – schools, roads, bridges, fire houses, etc. The state doesn't care where the money comes from, as long as it's there. It's called "concurrency" and Gov. Jeb Bush and the Legislature demanded this.

The question now becomes, who pays for all of these things? That's what we have to ask ourselves. We can all agree that impact fees are painful, and no one wants to pay them. But it doesn't matter what we want in this regard. The state's already decided. Someone will pay for growth.

Why is the state being so mean to us? Well, that's because unchecked growth without concurrency has left many parts of Florida with not enough schools, not enough roads, existing roadways clogged with traffic and inadequate facilities to handle all the people.

Everyone in Highlands County wants our local economy stimulated. We understand that putting construction workers back to work would make a big difference - at least in the short term - for some people. But anyone who believes tossing impact fees is some sort of silver bullet to all that ails our local economy is wrong. And in the end, it's really about who pays the bill for growth – locals or newcomers.

That's where reasonable people have to consider everything and who will be affected most. The impact fee committee has some tough work ahead.

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