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Impact fee pleadings resume

Contributed by [Tom Palmer](#) - Posted: October 22, 2008 1:44:58 PM

The current depressed economy has brought up the issue of what to do with impact fees, at least as far as the County Commission is concerned.

Commissioner Randy Wilkinson wants to cut the fees by 50 percent for commercial development to encourage commercial development, arguing residential is already overbuilt--he quoted estimates of 7,500 unsold homes in Polk County--and needs no impact fee break.

Carlton Hodges from the Polk County Builders Association wants to simply suspend charging impact fees on all development for a year.



This kind of debate occurs from time to time. Commissioners took no action, agreeing they will talk about it when they take up the periodic update of the fees via a consultant study due in a few months.

Meanwhile, county staffers are still gathering data. One important part is whether what the county's charging for impact fees has some relation to what it costs to improve roads or other facilities to handle the demand the new development causes.

That will be key because it's well accepted that one of the factors that led to the county's infrastructure deficit was the decision by former commissions to favor development interests by keeping impact fees low, especially in relation to what other local governments were charging.

Perhaps the most graphic example is Lakeland Highlands Road. The northern part inside Lakeland was widened years ago, thanks to the city's decision in the 1980s to charge realistic impact fees. The southern part of Lakeland Highlands is only now being planned for widening now that the county finally raised the revenue to do it.

There's nothing like being stuck in traffic to move public policy debates from the theoretical to the practical.

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Posted By: efwinline (10/23/2008 6:31:08 AM)

Comment: I've got to take issue with you on this one -- at least the part about Lakeland Highlands Road. What area of Lakeland Highlands are you talking about and are you sure of the impact fee funding source? The most northern section (North of the fire station to Edgewood was done multi decades ago, perhaps all the way back to the fire station opening date. I think that predates the impact fee hysteria period entirely. My guess would have been that funding was either a state grant to widen roads from US 98 to the new firestation, or possibly by the construction funding provided by the Lakeland Electric transfer to the city. Then we have the section from Edgewood to the Polk Parkway. I was thinking that funding was from the state (this is State Route 37-B) at the time of the Polk Parkway. Maybe you are aware of developer credits from the Lowes and Sams developmments. Or maybe you mean the normal impact fees we have today. At one time, there was discussion of the possibility of state funding for the yet to be done section of 37B, but I don't know where that went. Bottom line, I'm not so sure this situation should be attributed to Lakeland's "decision in the 1980's to charge realistic impact fees". But I could be wrong.

Response: What the deal was (your response jogged my memory) was that Bob Harper and some of the other folks leading the PCBA at the time persuaded the County Commission not to levy impact fees on projects that would affect state roads, arguing that was DOT's responsibility. Lakeland commissioners resisted that argument. As a result Lakeland had the impact fees to match DOT money. Lakeland Highlands is now a county road. DOT generously gave Polk County a bunch of roads to maintain some time ago.

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