

Impact fees will offset the cost of development in Sumter County

By PATRICIA STEELE, DAILY SUN

BUSHNELL — The cost of growth to a community or county is more than just the dollars and cents required to construct a subdivision.

The cost also includes building new schools or expanding existing schools that will educate the children from those developments.

Randy Young of Redmond, Wash.-based Henderson, Young and Co., who presented the results of a recent study requested by the Sumter County School Board, suggested the school district consider an education impact fee of \$8,735.98 for a single-family home.

"Sumter County developed transportation impact fees years ago," Young told Sumter County School Board members at an impact fee workshop Monday morning.

"It wasn't popular, but it became evident in time that it was necessary," Young said. "And for the Sumter school district to keep up with projected growth expected during the next five years, you need to consider impact fees."

Young explained that the School Board cannot adopt impact fees; that is the province of county or city governments. In this case board members will consider their options, then send a proposal to the Sumter County Commission.

"The commissioners, if they approve the education impact fees, would adopt an ordinance," Young said. "And they would collect the money."

Several board members had questions about school concurrency as required by state legislation and the role that impact fees play in that concept.

Young explained that concurrency numbers are based on state Department of Education enrollment projections and that impact fees are based on actual student enrollment numbers compiled by the Sumter County School District and Sumter County population numbers based on the 2000 U.S. Census.

"No one pays twice," explained Jim Allen, School Board facilities manager. "If a developer is required to pay a proportionate fair share as mandated in achieving concurrency, they would not pay impact fees. And no deed-restricted retirement community pays proportionate fair share or education impact fees. They are exempt."

Young stressed that the impact fees contained in the study are just a suggestion. The School Board will have to work with county commissioners, and the commissioners may believe the amount is too much or may wonder if it's enough.

"Lake County is looking at increasing education impact fees to about \$17,000," Young said.

The study was based on how much it will cost the school system, per student, to build new facilities.

"We have to use totals from construction to elementary schools as a basis for the study," Allen said. "The district hasn't built a school in more than 20 years. We have added and replaced classrooms, cafeterias and such, but we do not have current numbers to compare for building a school from the ground up."

The state estimates that it costs about \$15,000 per student for a station in an elementary school. That number climbs to nearly \$25,000 for a high school.

The study presented to the School Board estimated that the cost for a station in an elementary school was nearly \$28,000 because Young's figures including the costs of building offices, a media center and a cafeteria as well as debt service on money borrowed to construct the school.

"These are all costs that drive the student costs up, because every student will benefit from these buildings in one way or another," Allen said.

Further discussion of the impact study will be on the regular meeting agenda during the next few weeks so that board members can work out details of the proposal they take to the County Commission.

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