

Martin raises developer fees 22 percent

By [JASON SCHULTZ](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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STUART — Developers will be paying about 22 percent more per home that they build in Martin County to ensure there are enough new schools for all the students in their new homes.

County commissioners voted 4-1 to increase the school impact fees charged to developers from about \$4,555 to about \$5,567 for a 2,000 square foot home.

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James Nicholas, a county consultant, said the increase was needed because the cost of building new schools has gone up. The school board needs about \$23,000

from developers per new student to provide space.

Martin County's school impact fees, which will take effect on Oct. 1, will be higher than the statewide average of about \$4,200 and also higher than Palm Beach of St. Lucie counties' fees.

The county's impact fee review committee, which advises the commission on fees, recommended approving the school increase.

But its chairman, Richard Towne, told commissioners that Nicholas' report was "seriously flawed" and the increase was far too low to cover costs.

He said existing taxpayers would get stuck with the bill for new schools because impact fees will not raise enough money.

Developers and business officials have criticized proposed increases to the county's impact fees for schools and other public services. Commissioners have already delayed voting on all of the other fees besides schools until this summer.

Tammy Simoneau, executive director of the Economic Development Council, said the school board was trying to use the impact fees to make up for budget shortfalls, not cover the impacts of new residents.



She also said that raising fees will make living in Martin County less affordable.

"The increase of just \$1,000 isn't paid for by the developer. It's passed on to the homeowner," she said.

Commissioner Lee Weberman, who voted against the increase, said he didn't want to put more of a burden on small businesses by hurting the local construction economy.

"There are a lot of people hurting out there," Weberman said.

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