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## **Medical office impact fee appeal denied**

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The Coweta County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously Thursday to deny the impact fee appeal filed by Coweta County Medical Office Investors.

The appeal was first heard in November.

The developers of the medical office building on Francis Way, which houses a cardiology practice and the Piedmont Newnan Hospital Sleep center, began the project before the county had impact fees for transportation projects. But by the time the building permit was issued, impact fees for transportation had been implemented.

The fees had only been in place a few days when the building permits were issued. Attorney Mark Oldenburg, representing the developers, said that would not have happened if the review by the Coweta Water and Sewer Department had been more timely.

The county has a mechanism whereby developers can "freeze" fees at their current rate when they first make application, but Oldenburg said his clients didn't know that.

County Administrator Theron Gay had denied the request to refund the \$107,000 in transportation fees last fall. The appeal was then made to the county commissioners.

A decision had been put off for several months as the county waited on additional information from the developers.

"It's not the county's fault, it's the applicant's fault," said Commissioner Randolph Collins. "I'd like to move forward and get this off the books rather than keep playing games with them."

Oldenburg said the issue they had been working on was consideration of whether the building might qualify for an impact fee exemption. "We have done a great deal of research," he said. But his findings are "in my opinion, that we are not entitled to any exemption."

"I think we should follow the lead of the administrator and deny it," said Commissioner Al Smith. He made a motion to that effect, and the vote was unanimous.

Collins also made his feelings known on the county's actions in a budget crunch.

While the board was confirming recent personnel actions, Collins said that, until the economy improves, "I want us to be very tight on new personnel adding. Even with the new assistant administrator position, I think we need to look at it and hold it as long as possible and make sure we can probably live without it a little while until we have a better revenue base."

Gay said he has been challenging county employees to come up with cost savings. Some positions may need to be filled, but if they are filled with current county employees, the jobs those employees leave may not need to be "back filled."

"If we can live without refilling the vacant positions, please let's do that," Collins said. "We've talked about tightening our belts, this is where we need to start."

Collins said he is not suggesting letting people go, just not hiring.

A replacement for Assistant Administrator Roxie Clark is pretty critical, though, said Chairman Paul Poole.

Clark will be retiring at the end of the year following 15 years in the position.

"Other personnel may need to step up, move around, do different things," Collins said.

"Just look at the picture and be conscious."

The board also heard a spotlight presentation from Bill Harrison of the Coweta County Development Authority on the accomplishments of 2008.

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