

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.heraldtribune.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Article published Jun 23, 2007

Without the impact fee increases in North Port, street work and other plans will slow

By JOHN DAVIS
john.davis@heraldtribune.com

NORTH PORT -- The city might have to delay widening Sumter Boulevard, building two new fire stations and finishing the Garden of the Five Senses park if it delays planned impact fee hikes, city engineer Pat Collins said Friday.

North Port is considering putting off increases in its impact fees in an attempt to lure business growth to the city.

The breaks for commercial development, which could be voted into law next month, could also mean delaying the right-of-way purchases along Price Boulevard, a major artery that the city has long wanted to improve.

Collins told commissioners that "it would make it much better" financially for the city's long-term building plans if they raised fees in October as planned.

Under North Port's original plan, impact fees would go up across the board in October, with shopping centers seeing an 18 percent increase.

But City Commissioner Jim Blucher, who supports giving developers the break, said: "If the impact fees as planned do not come in, we're in the exact same situation, are we not?"

The home-building boom that followed North Port's population explosion of the past five years has largely stopped, causing the city to cut back spending plans and look to commercial development to catch up with the rooftops.

But the plan to freeze impact fees has its critics.

City Manager Steve Crowell said that any spark the impact fee freeze would have on the local economy would not be realized for three years, noting that city revenue projections were based on developments that are "in the works already."

North Port is going to lose a projected \$11 million by delaying the impact fee increase.

Budget planners are still working out which projects will be pushed back.

City Commissioners Barbara Gross and Fred Tower wanted to go forward with the increases as planned, but could not sway the other three commissioners.

"We're going to be faced with a lot of concurrency problems," Gross said.

"We're going to be faced with not being able to do a lot of stuff."

THE TALLY

Projected loss in North Port impact fee revenues next year:

Transportation \$12 million

Fire \$1.4 million

Parks and recreation \$1.3 million

Law enforcement \$466,311