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OFFICIALS: Overbuilding, Not Impact Fees Led To Housing Slump

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By [Jim Konkoly](#) | Highlands Today

Published: April 10, 2008

SEBRING – Statistics can provide an eye-opening look into reality or a misleading plunge into misguided policies, depending on how they're interpreted.

The 11-member Citizens Advisory Committee on Impact fees, appointed by the Highlands County commissioners, dove into dozens of pages of financial statistics containing tens of thousands of numbers on Wednesday afternoon.

With county officials explaining the numbers, the committee began research aimed at seeing the real financial picture of the Highlands County economy and what, if anything, county government can do to improve it.

For the typical new home built in the county, at 2,000 square feet, the eight impact fees total \$6,034. The fees are collected to cover state mandated costs for infrastructure due to growth.

While some builders have blamed impact fees as one factor that has slowed down new home and commercial construction, some statistics paint a different story.

County Administrator Carl Cool told the committee that impact fees in Collier County are four and one-half times as high as Highlands County's, at more than \$27,000 for a 2,000-square-foot home.

Yet, Cool said, Collier County, whose county seat is Naples, still has a thriving building industry that hasn't been killed by high impact fees or a bad economy.

"Collier has the highest impact fees and their growth continues," he said.

Collier County, for example, charges \$11,000 in impact fees for transportation (road building) alone, compared to Highlands County's \$2,100 transportation impact fee.

For parks and recreation, the Highlands County impact fee is \$261; in Collier County the impact fee for parks is \$3,700.

Overall, Cool reported, Highlands County ranks in the bottom third (with the bottom third being the lowest cost) among the 52 Florida counties that charge impact fees. Counties that don't charge impact fees have to provide some other tax revenue to cover the infrastructure costs.

Up-to-date, statewide statistics show that impact fees vary widely by counties in the various categories for which they are imposed. For example, for fire protection, Highlands County charges a \$217 impact fee. The cheapest impact fee for fire protection in Florida is Brevard County, at \$39.

Meanwhile, Dixie County has the most expensive fire protection impact fee at \$1,242.

Impact fees to build additional jail cells as population increases also vary widely, from \$215 in Highlands County to \$795 in Sarasota County.

Nearly half of the impact fees in Highlands County go for schools, at \$3,000 out of the total \$6,034 on the 2,000-square-foot new home.

According to county building department staff, construction is down 72 percent, from October 2006 through February 2007 compared to October 2007 through February 2008.

Ricky Helms, assistant county administrator, said builders overbuilt during the so-called building boom or "bubble" of 2005 and 2006, when homes prices jumped by more than 50 percent over the two-year span.

Speculators trying to cash in on the rising home and lot prices constructed more homes than there were buyers for, leaving the glut of homes for sale now, he said.

The committee's next meeting is scheduled for 3 p.m. on April 28.

Jack Richie, chairman of the committee, is lining up experts as guest speakers for future meetings. Richie has said committee members need to study and understand the complex issues involved with impact fees before they can recommend policies to the county.

By early August, the committee will make recommendations to the county commissioners on whether to lower, eliminate, raise or maintain the current impact fees.

Commissioners must vote by Oct. 1 to set new impact fees for 2009.

Reader Comments

Voice your opinion by [posting a comment](#).

Posted by (whodat) on 04/10/2008 at 07:40 pm.

What a difference a day makes.

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Posted by (mapper) on 04/10/2008 at 10:41 pm.

Okay my turn to vent: I still want someone to tell me how I IMPACT anything when I build onto my existing home.

And BTW folks, when we moved here before impact fee existed people who lived here paid for our IMPACT but now those of you who live here are tired of paying your share of that back so now it's up to the new people being forced to pay AND also existing people paying more too.

I'm sorry but government tells you that it takes this much money to cover the cost of growth and we say why sure thing. How do the retirees who move here with no children IMPACT the school system.

It a money grubbing scheme by those who have, to keep them that want, from getting it.

Now prove me wrong.

Post some real data that proves that I or those retirees cost this county one darn thing.

How does EVERYONE who moves here impact the jail? Perhaps to help cut the costs of the jail portion we can stop locking people up for the stupid crimes. When you catch them driving with no lic. take the car rather than put them in jail. Build a trustee farm and let them work off the petty stuff.

We seem to just need bigger and bigger jails rather than try to address the problem with common sense.

About the only thing I really agree with is the fire assessments. And they shouldn't be based on impact fees. they should be charged to all of us.

But anyway you look at it these impact fees are NOT a one size fits all but that the only thing we're being offered.

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Posted by (jhd) on 04/11/2008 at 05:05 am.

Finally some folks with some sense come to the realisation that it's not the impact fees, but rather the glut of homes that has led to the housing slump. Add to that the unsustainable lending practices by lenders over the past 3 or 4 years, and the fact that there are few jobs in the area that pay a living wage and you have a more complete picture of the dead housing market in Highlands county. Young people with families in this area have few options other than working in a restaurant and surviving off a 50 cent tip from some retiree who orders a baked potato and a glass of water. How can they be expected to buy a home when they can't even make ends meet feeding their kids? If you don't like the impact fees buy an existing home and avoid them.

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Posted by (Been_There_Done_That) on 04/11/2008 at 05:59 am.

They should begin charging folks an impact fee to move here, regardless of whether they buy a home or rent an apartment. People cost \$\$\$ for services, regardless of what they do.

People are to blame for the weakness in housing. Builders over built to make a quick buck. We have tens of thousands of lots ready to build on. We surely do not need new cities in Highlands County, until most of the existing inventory is sold and occupied by tax paying people -- not owned by speculators and slum lords.

If counties charged for sending your kids to Public Schools we could see a lot fewer drop outs. Being free, most people do not appreciate the Public Education, nor do they appreciate the Public Safety and roads they enjoy here.

Florida charges an impact fee if you move a vehicle here from out of state and register it here. You pay regardless of whether you drive 1000 miles a year, or you drive 100,000 miles a year.

If you want to play, then you have to pay. No more free lunch in Highlands County.

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Posted by (jotter) on 04/11/2008 at 10:52 pm.

Collier County (Naples, Marco Island...) is still a hot market because it is coastal and attracts a wealthy clientele. They could probably increase their impact fees more and still be a healthy market. People coming to Highlands County are looking for inexpensive everything (cheap housing... cheap shopping... cheap dining...) and they are obviously more likely impacted by impact fees added to their cost of new homes. Impact fees are not evil... but out of control spending is.

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Posted by (Been_There_Done_That) on 04/12/2008 at 06:35 am.

Two income couples making a total of \$40,000 a year cannot qualify for all these new homes with starting prices of \$140,000 and up, using safe conventional financing.

The very people we are trying to help, the young kids starting out, cannot afford a new home here. What the market has become is a market for high income professionals, or well healed couples looking to retire - both classes can easily afford the meager impact fees being charged.

I would be persuaded to agree with the arguments IF builders could and did offer a new home with lot in the price range of \$100,000 - \$120,000. I don't see that product on the local market.

Many of the land use changes recently are for plans to build "upscale" \$300,000 and more, condos, villas, attached living spaces.

Again, Carl Cool is looking to pander to his realtor friends. If the realtors and builders want to target advertise, fine - let them pay for it.

By the way, that is no excuse for an economic stimulus. Whatever positive effect the real estate advertising will have would not be seen for another year. By then, the economic recovery should be complete.

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Posted by (mapper) on 04/14/2008 at 12:42 pm.

Again, Carl Cool is looking to pander to his realtor friends. If the realtors and builders want to target advertise, fine - let them pay for it.

I just realized who his wife is. You may be onto something.
Stranger things have happened I guess.

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