



This is a printer friendly version of an article from [www.theledger.com](http://www.theledger.com)  
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

---

*Published: Wednesday, February 20, 2008*

## Lower Impact Fee Plans Die

The plan to cut Polk County's impact fees died Wednesday afternoon after no one would second County Commissioner Jack Myers' motion to reduce the fees on a new home from \$11,821 to \$7,996.

A subsequent attempt to impose a smaller, 25 percent cut in the fees failed 3-2. Only Commission Chairman Sam Johnson supported Myers second motion. Commissioners Bob English, Jean Reed and Randy Wilkinson voted against it. English said he didn't think the proposal would aid the economy as billed, calling it a "hope not a promise"

Myers' motions came following a three-hour public hearing.

Myers, a persistent critic of impact fees, had proposed the cut earlier this month. Impact fees are used to pay for roads and public facilities that must be upgraded as a result of new development.

The proposal would have reduced the impact fee on a new home from \$11,821 to \$7,996 by cutting impact fees for roads, parks, police, fire, libraries and ambulance service in half.

County staffers projected that would mean an \$18.3 million drop in revenue. What that would have meant in concrete terms could have been the halt of work until next year on the second phase of County Road 540A, delay plans to widen portions of Berkley Road, County Line Road and Kathleen Road.

In addition, the loss of revenue would have delayed the construction of three new fire stations as well as purchase of new park land and computers for local libraries.

During the hearing, members of the local development industry wearing "Save Our Jobs" tags on their clothing contributed to an overflow crowd that spilled into the building's lobby.

A procession of builders spoke in favor of the cut, many describing having to lay off employees because of the slow housing market.

"Everyone's running skeleton crews," said contractor Chuck Hunt. "Put our people to work."

Contractor Doug Thomas said the impact fee cut is worth trying.

"We won't know until we try," he said.

The construction workers outnumbered a handful of others who argued against the impact fee cut.

Al Whittle from Florida Bipartisans criticized the proposal, calling it “posing the wrong solution to the right problem.”

Impact fees have nothing to do with the housing slump, he said, laying the blame instead overbuilding and unscrupulous lending.

He said impact fees will keep Polk County from getting into a hole with the infrastructure deficit.

At the heart of the issue was whether cutting impact fees would help to revive the local homebuilding industry and the economy in general.

Two local economists, Gordon Kettle and Asim Khan, concluded that reducing impact fees would have a minimal effect on the local economy.

The economic discussion consumed the first 90 minutes of the hearing.

Cutting impact fees “would not have a dramatic impact,” Kettle said, explaining other factors such as prices and interest rates would have more impact.

He said it would take 20 to 21 months to turn around the current unsold housing inventory.

“There’s no easy button answer,” Kettle said. “It won’t restore the housing industry to what it was.”

On other side was Elliot Eisenberg, an economist for the National Association of Home Builders, who argued reducing impact fees would allow more people to buy homes. He said impact fees inflate the price of homes.

Following the public hearing, Scott Coloumbe, executive director of the Polk County Builders Association said he disagreed with the vote and said it was based on misinformation.



SCOTT WHEELER | THE LEDGER People hold up "save our jobs" signs during a public hearing to consider adoption of an ordinance to cut impact fees by half.



SCOTT WHEELER | THE LEDGER The Polk County Builders Association urged members to fill parking spaces at the Neil Combee County Administration Building with construction vehicles in an attempt to persuade commissioners to cut impact fees by half.



SCOTT WHEELER | THE LEDGER People watch televisions from chairs set up in the lobby of the Neil Combee County Administrative Building during a hearing to consider adoption of an ordinance to reduce impact fees by half. The 2x4s have "save our jobs" stickers or "housing=jobs" stickers and were from different companies in the construction business.