

Originally appeared on News-Journal Online at

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December 27, 2007

Impact fee of any percentage times zero still equals no roads

By **STAN JANZEN**
COMMUNITY VOICES

Aiden Magee's Community Voices diatribe about impact fees is so far off base, it is comical. Clearly, Magee does not know enough of the details to have a truly informed opinion about impact fees, road building and more. He would have readers believe that Volusia County taxpayers subsidize Volusia homebuilders' and developers' road needs. The county has not used ad valorem tax revenue to build new roads for as long as I can remember.

As a matter of fact, the county not using our ad valorem tax dollars to build new roads is a part of the problem. Currently, the county largely funds new road needs on the back of the building industry via impact fees. Now that building has slowed to a halt, few new roads are being built because of the tremendous decrease in impact fee revenue. Attend a county road-building workshop and they'll tell you the same thing.

Furthermore, the decrease in new construction has led the county manager to ask for assistance from our local higher education institutions in Volusia County to figure out how to pay for future road infrastructure needs; a wise move. Clearly, the county manager's vision extends past that of normal Volusia County residents. In a recent survey, a large majority of county residents stated that they felt there was no problem with our transportation infrastructure.

Additionally, with new state laws regarding concurrency, developers and home builders are now required to pay for future road needs twice. First, we pay via impact fees, then we pay again in the form of proportionate share mitigation. I implore Magee to prove to me where he has ever subsidized a new development's needs.

The stale argument that he uses, that "growth doesn't pay for itself," is clearly not true. Not only has the Volusia Home Builders Association commissioned a study, which clearly proved that our industry pumps more than \$1.2 billion worth of revenue into the local economy each year, but now that a "building slowdown" has occurred, now that people are no longer building and/or buying houses, local governments and the blue-collar work force are feeling the pinch. Local governments are not getting those fat checks from our industry anymore, and local residents are not getting paychecks, period.

In the grand scheme of things, the aforementioned points are what our local elected leaders must consider first. Do the math with me here. A 231 percent increase in the road impact fee, multiplied by zero building, still equals zero! Also, the road impact fee study has some serious flaws, which lead me to believe that the figures inputted into the study are inflated. Just because some kick the building industry while it is down, and thereby attempt to further injure our local economy and the ability of Volusia County residents to make money, doesn't mean it is the right thing to do.

The economy of our entire state depends on the construction industry (growth). Don't believe me? Call our local legislators, and ask them why they've needed to cut more than \$1 billion from the state's budget before they even get to Tallahassee for the regular session in 2008. The state has already made a \$1 billion cut from the budget in 2007? The reason is because of the condition of the construction industry. I think it says a lot that people like Magee are still demanding handouts from the building industry.

I sincerely do not believe that folks understand that homebuilding is what has been keeping our economy afloat for a number of years. Every day, I get a call from someone who has lost a job; a banker, a Realtor, a carpenter, a salesperson, a plumber, a roofer; the list goes on and on. The depressed real estate market is having real-life impacts on a lot of hardworking residents and families of Volusia County. A large number of people have lost their construction-industry related jobs in the past few months. During this time of year, many families are finding it difficult to make ends meet. Unfortunately, it may still get worse. The good old days of arguing about growth are over because there is no growth.

As we step back and take a look at the situation we find ourselves in, it is the job of our local leaders to first figure out how to get our residents back to work, and how to get our economy back on track. Right now, it would be extremely counterproductive to increase any fees for anybody. Simply put, nobody can afford it, and even if they could, they are not going to pay it.

While Magee may be interested in sending business out of town, I can assure him, not many others in Volusia County are. In his commentary, he mentioned that he is experiencing a depreciating level of service from his local government. He seemed very upset about this. I suppose what troubles me the most is that he and others do not realize that it is because the home-

building industry is no longer supporting the economy. Ignorance is bliss, they say.

Janzen is president of the Volusia Home Builders Association and president of Woodmark Construction.

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