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Recreation Impact Fee Money Reserved for Parks Only, Commissioners Say

However, commissioners did not say when they will free construction money collected from developers for improvements at the Land O' Lakes Recreation Center.

By [Neil Johnson](#) | [Email the author](#) | September 7, 2011 | [Print](#)

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Supporters of the Land O' Lakes Community Center got [some of what they wanted](#) from county commissioners. Money raised by recreation impact fees can't be diverted for other uses.

Sandy Graves, president of the Heritage Park Foundation, asked commissioners for assurance that about 10 percent of the money collected from developers would be used for proposed renovations of the park.

Graves said the foundation, a nonprofit group formed to support the community center in Land O' Lakes, is spending priorities toward roads or safety instead of parks.

The foundation has been raising additional money for improvements at the park, such as the creation of an amphitheater, which is a part of the community's history.

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She did not want to see money set aside for improvements at the park become a victim of the change in pr

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Commissioner Ted Schrader said he knew of no reason to divert the impact fees already collected and that only be spent on recreation.

The county charges impact fees to offset the cost of providing services caused by growth such as parks and recreation. Commissioner Pat Mulieri expressed her support for the Land O' Lakes center.

"This is like the centerpiece of Land O' Lakes," she said.

Though impact fee money is available to enhance the park in Land O' Lakes, the county doesn't have many supporters will have to wait.

[Renovation plans for the park](#) include redoing the playing fields, adding a new concession stand/restroom. But Graves didn't get assurance that commissioners intended to restore money to the county parks and recreation after severe spending cuts since 2008.

Parks and Rec Spending on the Decline

Spending for parks and recreation dropped more than 34 percent since 2008, including a cut of nearly 4.5 percent that starts Oct. 1.

Cuts to the parks budget since 2008 outstripped the overall decline in spending of 25.5 percent.

The county's proposed budget calls for spending \$7.7 million on parks and recreation in the 2011-12 fiscal year.

In 2008, the parks budget was \$11.7 million.

Though commissioners didn't agree to restore the recreation department budget, there is some support on boosting recreation.

Commissioner Jack Mariano agreed that parks formed the centerpieces of communities.

"I really think we need to fund them and cut fees. These parks are good for our quality of life and good for the economy. But Commission Chairwoman Ann Hildebrand said commissioners have to balance their priorities against the budget. "We're trying to keep our millage down," she said.

After the meeting, Graves said she understood the timing was wrong for commissioners to build new park facilities.

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