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Impact fees may change in Santa Rosa County

Santa Rosa looking to boost revitalization

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The Santa Rosa County Commission is considering changing the impact fees the county collects to help build roads and bridges.

The discussion came during an annual review of the impact fee ordinance Tuesday. One key area of discussion was the impact the fees have on revitalization efforts in historic districts.

Cassandra Sharp, a Milton businesswoman who owns the former post office on U.S. 90 in downtown, wants to open Old Post Office Antiques in the historic building, but she got a shock when she went to pay her impact fees. The county was counting the fees as if the building was new because it had been vacant for more than four years.

"They wanted me to pay a little over \$33,000," Sharp said.

Sharp convinced county officials that the building had not been vacant and the impact fees dropped to \$2,500.

Commissioner Bob Cole, whose district includes the historic districts in Bagdad as well as Milton, said he would support eliminating the fee on historic buildings, and cutting it on other structures in the districts.

Commissioner Tom Stewart said he would like to look at some changes, including credit for businesses that change locations within the same district.

Commissioner Don Salter said he would consider changes but reminded the commission of why the fees were adopted.

Voters had rejected a sales tax increase to pay for roads.

"There was a big push in this county to make new development pay for itself," Salter said. "It's the only significant source of revenue we have to improve our roads. Some of our roads are in trouble now."