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### Palm Beach County rejects hiking fees on new homeowners

By Mark Hollis

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WEST PALM BEACH

Wary of increasing the cost of housing at a time when homes sales are sluggish, Palm Beach County commissioners Tuesday rejected calls to increase impact fees paid by new homebuyers.

County staff had recommended a 9.3 percent increase, or \$963 hike, on the typical new home under 2,000 square feet. It would have ramped up the total impact fee paid by the buyer of a home between 1,400 and 1,999 square feet to nearly \$11,000.

"I think it's a symbolic effort," Commissioner Mary McCarty said of the gesture to the housing industry to time...The building industry is having a hard time... (Delaying a vote for additional impact fees) sends a message that we do know what's going on."

Two commissioners -- Jess Santamaria and Burt Aaronson -- voted in favor of increasing the impact fees, saying that the county would only be delaying the inevitable need for raising revenues to help pay for the costs of growth, such as new roads and public buildings.

"You call it a symbolic gesture," Santamaria said to McCarty, "but it aint going to help."

Santamaria, a developer, said that what the housing industry needs is a major reduction in the price of homes and property.

He and Aaronson said the \$936 increase would be unlikely to price anyone out of buying a new home.

The impact fee increase was opposed by a local builders association, several business groups and a municipal association.

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