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State bills could have multimillion-dollar impact

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The Charlotte County Commission was presented analyses of proposed legislation Tuesday.

MURDOCK -- Considering they face a self-imposed \$48 million budget shortfall, one could understand why members of the Charlotte County Commission are not too excited by the prospect of further tax reductions from the Florida Legislature.

And so it was without any surprise that the commissioners reacted poorly to a breakdown of potential tax-legislation impacts Tuesday.

"Especially for our local delegation, it's time for them to step up and protect the interests," Commissioner Robert Skidmore said. "We're doing our part here locally."

There are a number of possible tax-reform bills floating around the Legislature. The greatest impact would come from a 1.35 percent annual property valuation cap. Such a change would have an impact of \$16 million on Charlotte County, bringing total ad valorem revenues down to around \$130 million.

Another proposed piece of legislation would ban impact fees statewide through September 2012. Impact fees are a tax assessed to a new home or business, based on the impact it will have on local utilities and services.

Almost all counties in Florida levy impact fees to offset the cost of paying for infrastructure. As Chairwoman Tricia Duffy noted, municipalities are forced, in many cases, to do this because Florida law has concurrency mandates which require certain standards of service to be achieved in each community.

Duffy said an impact-fee moratorium, which would cost the county an estimated \$8.5 million each year, would be a poor move.

"That doesn't make any sense to me," Duffy said.

Skidmore concurred.

"I don't think we ever want the state telling us what we have to do, and how long we have to do it," he said. "Growth will dictate impact fees."

For the next step, county staff will draft a letter, summarizing the County Commission's stance in opposition to the proposed legislation. It will be approved by the commission and sent to members of the Florida House and Senate and Gov. Charlie Crist.

Skidmore said he plans to go beyond that.

"It's a great start," he said, "but there's nothing like picking up that phone and calling an office."

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