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State gives Charlotte \$2 million

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Reduced impact fees leads to grant for affordable housing

Charlotte County will be presented with \$2 million Tuesday for lowering impact fees.

MURDOCK -- Charlotte County's proactive reduction of impact fee taxes will bring a surprise windfall of revenue from the state.

State Rep. Gary Aubuchon, R-Cape Coral, will be on hand at Tuesday's Charlotte County Commission meeting to present the county with a \$2 million affordable housing grant from the Impact Fee Reduction Incentive Program.

Some view the county as being on the forefront of the controversial impact fee matter. The fees play an important role in financing infrastructure, but business and construction leaders feel they stifle economic growth.

Gov. Charlie Crist recently signed a bill into law that provides \$75 million to local governments that have reduced their impact fees by 25 percent, according to the Fort Myers News-Press.

In the fall of 2007, Charlotte County's commissioners approved rolling back both residential and commercial impact fees.

Rates were rolled back to 1998 levels, with \$8,000 impact fees decreasing to \$2,500. The reduction was extended again last year.

Impact fees are a tax that is assessed on a new structure. They are designed to offset the impact that the new building will have on the surrounding infrastructure, such as utilities and roads. As do other jurisdictions, Charlotte County charges developers impact fees for roads, libraries, parks, law enforcement, fire and public buildings. The impact fees are viewed as helping the county expand its infrastructure to meet the demands of new growth.

The county is currently pursuing a new tiered impact fee structure, which it plans to finalize this summer.

According to the existing impact fees, a single-family residence would be charged the same amount of impact fees whether it was built in the heart of Port Charlotte or in rural Charlotte County.

With tiered impact fees, three regions would be identified: urban, the urban reserve and rural Charlotte County.

In order to control development and prevent urban sprawl, the county will use the less expensive impact fees in the urban service area as a way to encourage homes to be built in the right location.

The urban areas include Englewood and Cape Haze, Port Charlotte, greater Punta Gorda and Burnt Store, where the county still has 150,000 to 170,000 existing platted vacant lots. The urban reserve includes properties east of Punta Gorda and the South County urban service areas. The rural area includes those properties east of State Road 31.

E-mail: nhughes@sun-herald.com

By NEIL HUGHES

Staff Writer

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