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Miami-Dade developers OK with a road impact fee hike, say they 'recognize' large increase in infrastructure costs

By Risa Polansky

Miami-Dade County is to increase its road impact fees to developers — charges could more than triple by 2014 — but the development community is OK with it, the head of the Builders Association of South Florida says.

Association President Rey Melendi acknowledged that, given the economy and price of materials, now is a tough time to be saddled with more costs.

But the county hasn't raised the fees for 14 years, and developers understand they've had a lengthy reprieve, he said.

They realize also that the county is in the same economic boat. "Their infrastructure costs have gone up as much as ours," Mr. Melendi said. "We recognize that these are actual costs that have increased exponentially, and it needs to be dealt with."

Florida statutes require that road impact fees adopted by county ordinance be calculated based on the "most recent and localized data" reflecting the cost of road construction, Esther Calas, county public works director, said in an e-mail.

"The cost basis of the ordinance has not been updated since 1994," she said. "Consequently, the proposed change in fees reflects the current costs of road construction and right of way."

The new fees, which commissioners initially approved in July, would be calculated using Florida Department of Transportation standards and would automatically increase annually corresponding with construction costs.

But to cushion the blow of higher fees during tight economic times, fee payers are to receive declining discounts of 70% to 10% over the next five years before being hit by the full new charges.

Now, a condominium or townhome developer pays in road impact fees \$921 per unit of development.

Under the proposed schedule, the fee would jump to \$3,674 per unit — but the full fees won't kick in until 2014.

In 2009, the developer would pay 30% of the increase: about \$1,102.

In 2010, the county would charge 50%, or, \$1,837. In 2011, 65%, or \$2,388. In 2012, 80%, or, \$2,939. And in 2013, 90%, or \$3,307.

The county is offering also a two-year window during which developers can pay impact fees at the old rates for developments with plats filed before January 2009.

Developers are welcoming the breaks, Ms. Calas said.

"The county has met with the development community and they understand that they will be impacted by the increase," she said. "Their concerns have been addressed in the ordinance. Also, they appreciate the fact that it will be gradually implemented over a period of five years."

The building community supports the arrangement, Mr. Melendi

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The county, he said, "need(s) our impact fee dollars to maintain and do roadway improvements."

The fee hike is expected to increase road impact fee revenue for the county by \$95 million to \$120 million over the next five years.



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