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Impact Fee System Studied at Retreat

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LAKELAND - A complex impact fee system that includes a provision for reduced fees for favored projects, indexing to keep up with inflation and alternative payment schedules was unveiled to the County Commission during an all-day retreat Thursday.

Assistant County Attorney Linda McKinley said the revised ordinance, which is scheduled for a public hearing April 18, is an attempt to consolidate the 21 impact fee ordinances the commission has approved since 1989, bring consistent language to the ordinance and add some new provisions.

Commissioners said they may hold a workshop to discuss the details of the ordinance before the public hearing.

Impact fees are charged on new development to get money to help defray the costs local government incurs in providing services, such as roads and schools, to serve the residents of that development.

Polk County levies impact fees to pay for roads, schools, parks, libraries, ambulance service, jails and fire protection.

Most of the discussion involved proposals to give impact fee breaks for new work-force housing and for something called "economic development mitigation." The proposal would:

Provide a 50 percent reduction of impact fees for work-force housing, which is housing rented or sold to moderate-income people as defined in the regulations. A provision to provide breaks for housing for low-income residents was already contained in the ordinance.

Provide a reduction of up to 60 percent of impact fees for businesses that bring new jobs at above-average wages or make capital investments of more than \$10 million.

The rationale behind the proposals was to make Polk County more competitive in attracting new industries and to make housing more affordable for the people who will be working for these and other businesses or for the local governments that serve them.

Commissioner Jean Reed questioned the proposal.

"You may be starting too high," she said. "You're giving away too much to begin with."

Reed said she was concerned about the fiscal impact.

County Manager Mike Herr said the county staff will prepare an estimate on the fiscal impact.

Commission Chairman Bob English wanted to expand the incentives.

He asked county staffers to explore providing some kind of impact fee break to developers who build office or industrial buildings and are able to quickly recruit an occupant who brings in new jobs paying above-average wages.

McKinley said it's important to review all of the proposed breaks to make sure there is a legitimate public purpose.

"We don't want a legal challenge," she said.

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