



Impact Fee Committee Will Greatly Benefit County

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Forming a committee of 11 people from varying fields is the best way to monitor and consider impact fees for Highlands County. With the right mix of people, from varying fields of expertise, they can de-politicize the debate about the fees.

The 11 positions include representatives from retail business, banking, homeowners associates, environmental community, real estate, builders, education, etc. It's a great cross-section of the population and should serve the county well.

No matter how impact fees are explained, it seems some people don't understand why they were implemented in the first place. It wasn't about elected officials or county administrators salivating at getting their hands on more money. The issue they were trying to address is concurrency, which is a state mandate.

Under concurrency, counties must provide the infrastructure necessary for growth before it is approved by the state. In the past, growth happened and infrastructure followed. This resulted in too much traffic, crammed schools, inadequate water supplies, etc. Impact fees were implemented to pay for the necessary roads, schools, bridges and anything else that growth impacts. It's to protect people already living here by having newcomers pay upfront for the impacts their presence brings.

Impact fees have been blamed on the down real estate market here and even the poor economy. That's certainly not the case. Those two things were going to suffer no matter what was decided on impact fees. Besides, large retailers and fast-food restaurants pay impact fees in most areas of Florida. It's just part of doing business.

How they are implemented and the cost of these fees is a legitimate item for debate. In some parts of the state, they are ridiculously high. Those fees might cause a business or home builder to reconsider. That's why the committee is necessary to make sure our fees realistically fit our area, but still meet our needs.

We would love for impact fees to go away and not need them. Then again, we don't think it's fair that huge developments could spring up without paying their fair share of the impacts they will have on our county.

It will be interesting to learn what the committee learns and recommends to county commissioners.

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