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Developer, LEDC Head Seek Low Impact Fees

Studiale, Scruggs say hard times call for fewer obstacles to development.

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LAKELAND | Transportation impact fees for new development in Lakeland are certain to decrease, but by how much is the question.

A developer and the head of a group trying to lure new business to the city urged city officials Friday to consider the low end of transportation impact fee proposals.

They said the harsh economic time everyone faces, including the city, calls for lowering obstacles to development.

Jim Studiale, Lakeland's community development director, said Friday at a City Commission agenda study that Lakeland doesn't need to mirror Polk County's impact fees.

The city is considering lower fees after a recent decrease in county impact fees.

But two commissioners, Justin Troller and Glenn Higgins, said they would be in favor of impact fees lower than those recommended by Studiale.

If the fees are lowered to levels beneath his recommendations, "I'll get over it," Studiale said.

"But it's the wrong thing to do."

Steve Scruggs, the executive director of the Lakeland Economic Development Council, said the LEDC has been supportive of impact fee hikes in the past.

But he said that in trying to attract new business to the city, "I don't want to be that much higher than the county" and give the county a competitive advantage.

Scruggs said he is most concerned about the city's proposed fees for new industrial, warehouse and high-tech buildings.

Transportation impact fees for new wholesale warehouses would drop from \$2,263 per 1,000 square feet to \$1,518 under Studiale's plan. The new Polk fee is \$1,353.

"I'm just a concerned citizen standing in front of the tsunami of impact fees," said George Lindsey, a local developer.

The city maintains that it has to spend more money to build "urban roads" rather than the rural roads in the unincorporated areas of Polk County.

Lindsey disputed that, saying the only difference in the two is that urban roads require more traffic lights.

The ordinance lowering impact fees is scheduled to be read into the record Monday during a regular City Commission meeting, and approved, in some form, April 20.

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