



Minton Road links U.S. 192 with Palm Bay Road.

FLORIDA TODAY FILE

County weighs higher fees

Advisers 'dead set against' boosting levy on new homes

DAVE BERMAN
FLORIDA TODAY

Brevard County commissioners today will consider a proposal to increase school impact fees on new single-family homes by \$651.10.

Under the proposal, the fee would increase by nearly 15 percent, rising to \$5,096.50 from the current \$4,445.40.

But two Brevard County advisory boards recommended against that increase — the Local Planning Agency by an 8-0 vote and the Building and Construction Advisory Committee by a 4-0 vote.

Minutes from the Sept. 28 Local Planning Agency discussion indicate that Bruce Moia, who is a member of both boards, said: "Everybody I've talked to, every builder in town, is dead set against that. The builders are up in arms, and they are not here now, but they are going to be here at the (County Commission) meeting, and the Realtors, so all of them will be here. There's no way I can approve that. We talked about this at length at the BCAC, and they were all dead set against it, as well."

During that Aug. 12 Building and Construction Advisory Committee meeting, board member Scott Carswell said: "Enough is enough."

Referring to a half-cent-on-the-dollar sales tax surcharge added this year to help pay for school infrastructure projects, Carswell said, "With the half-cent sales tax, when we're building a house, we're building in taxable items that are going to get taxed anyway when they buy the house, and then, to add more on top of that, it's tough to swallow."

The surcharge, which Brevard

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Minton corridor may become town center

West Melbourne studies bustling neighborhood as potential centerpiece

RICK NEALE
FLORIDA TODAY

WEST MELBOURNE — This suburban city of 20,078 residents has no discernible downtown, identifying locations or physical features that separate it from larger neighbors Melbourne and Palm Bay, City Hall planners admit.

However, West Melbourne officials hope to someday change that. And they're studying the bustling Minton Road corridor as a potential location for a "town center," or central business district.

Minton Road links U.S. 192 with Palm Bay Road and serves as the north-south transportation artery to West Melbourne City Hall, the post office, three public schools, the library, Calvary Chapel Melbourne and the Hammock Land-

ing shopping complex.

The target for the town center: Near West Melbourne Community Park, where a \$5.2 million athletic complex tailored for special-needs players is under construction in partnership with nonprofits Space Coast Field of Dreams and Promise in Brevard.

"Having a town center where one never grew organically is hard. But I think with good planning and community buy-in, there's an opportunity for people who are willing to take an investment risk," City Manager Scott Morgan said.

At the city's request, an American Planning Association volunteer team is crafting recommendations that may guide future development of nearly 400

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Minton Road highlights

2008: Hammock Landing opens

2010: West Melbourne becomes one of Brevard County's five most populous cities

2011: City acquires 18-acre park Max K. Rodes Park from Brevard County

2012: Design work begins on West Melbourne Community Park

2013: Preliminary plans approved for Sawgrass Lakes, a 933-home single-family subdivision.

2014: Construction contract awarded for Space Coast Field of Dreams

March: City Council enacts one-year moratorium on new gas stations on Minton Road

Minton

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acres along Minton Road, extending from Palm Gardens Golf Course southward to Hammock Landing.

The APA contingent will likely conduct a public workshop in West Melbourne in mid-January. The team leader is Bruce Knight, planning director of Champaign, Illinois, and an APA past president. The city will cover costs of the team's airfare, lodging and food.

A similar APA team drafted a town center report in September 2014 for Pine Hills, an Orlando suburb that was developed during the 1950s.

"I think there's all kinds of semi-suburban models in Florida already. If you look at Palm Beach Gardens on PGA Boulevard, it was pretty much typical strip-mall development or strip-mall retail. And they created a little area that has a town center," said Christy Fischer, planning and economic development director.

In a letter of support to the APA, Peter Morton, president of Morton Land Co., wrote that he has seen West Melbourne evolve from citrus groves and

cattle pastures to the fastest-growing city in Brevard. But he stated planning a town center near Minton Road will be difficult because of today's mix of numerous landowners and properties of varying sizes, shapes and current zoning uses.

Tuesday, the West Melbourne City Council will consider asking state legislators for \$1.05 million for a second phase of West Melbourne Community Park construction. These improvements include a splash park, amphitheater, picnic shelters, a boardwalk and pier, and other amenities.

Promise in Brevard has scheduled a Nov. 9 groundbreaking ceremony for its \$15.8 million residential campus for special-needs adults, which will be built off Norfolk Parkway near Hammock Landing.

In addition to the APA, Fischer said she will ask LEAD Brevard officials for recommendations on the town center project.

"It's never going to be a city of Melbourne downtown, or Titusville. And we're not trying to, because we don't have the historic basis. But, can it be something a little bit more intriguing?" Fischer said.

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TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY FILE PHOTO

Meadowlane Intermediate Elementary School in West Melbourne has 11 portable classrooms. West Melbourne is one area officials believe will need more school capacity in future years.

Fees

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County voters approved in the November election, raises Brevard County's sales tax rate from 6 to 6.5 percent. About \$32 million a year is expected to be collected each of the six years of the tax, and will pay for school building repairs, and security and technology upgrades. That money, however, cannot be used to help pay for new schools or school expansion projects.

The proposal county commissioners will consider also calls for school impact fees for other types of residences to decrease.

» Fees for multiple-family attached residences like condominiums, town-home and apartment units would decrease to \$1,940.50 from the current \$2,794.25. That's a decrease of nearly 31 percent.

» Fees for manufactured homes or mobile homes would decrease to \$1,256.50 from the current \$2,667.24, a decrease of nearly 53 percent.

The two advisory boards unanimously voted in favor of the decreases in those school impact fees.

If the County Commission approved all three fee changes, the aggregate impact would be a 10 percent, or roughly \$500,000, increase in the fees collected during the current budget year, according to Brevard County Planning and Development Department estimates.

The proposed fees are half of what was suggested by a consultant in a study released this year. The consultant's suggested changes were based on how much each type of housing affects student population counts in a community.

According to a transcript of the Building and Construction Advisory Committee meeting, committee member Mike Cunningham said: "Number one, I don't support impact fees, period. Secondly, I wouldn't support an increase, and, at the expense of the school board, I don't think they've been good stewards of the money for a number of years ... I'm not interested in studying the study, because my first statement was that I don't believe in impact fees, and I don't support impact fees at any level. In my opinion, impact fees should go back to zero ... We've got to slow the train down. I don't think the school board has done a good job with spending the money in the first place."

Committee Chair Ralph Durham said it appeared the committee consensus is that the proposed increase in the single-family home impact fee is "pretty extreme" and "too aggressive."

Durham asked Brevard County Planning and Development Director Robin Sobrino for her views on the process.

She told the Building and Construction Advisory Committee that she believes there is "excellent oversight on the part of the membership" of a special committee that oversees disbursement

Meeting today

The Brevard County Commission will discuss school impact fees (officially known as educational facilities impact fees) during its meeting that begins at 9 a.m. today at the Brevard County Government Center Commission Room, Building C, 2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Viera.

of the school impact fees "to ensure that the money is being spent exclusively towards defraying the cost of those expansion needs."

Sobrino also told the committee that she believed the county commissioners tried to come up with a "fair and equitable" compromise by recognizing the school district has a need for additional capacity, yet not pushing for the full increase in impact fees that the consultant suggested.

Any fee change would go into effect 90 days after approval by the County Commission — which would be Jan. 4, if the commissioners take a vote today.

People who have a building permit issued by that date or have a sales contract prior to the effective date would be entitled to pay the old rate.

County commissioners also will consider a proposal to reduce the number of school impact fee benefit districts from the current four to two. Fees collected from residential construction in a particular benefit district must be used in the geographic area of that district.

By going from four districts to two, Brevard Public Schools would have greater flexibility in using the money to help pay for new schools and adding space at existing schools. That's because they can draw the impact fee money from a wider geographic area if they want to build a new school or expand an existing school in Viera, for example.

Among the areas Brevard Public Schools officials are watching for potential need to increase school capacity are Cocoa, Viera and West Melbourne.

The proposed dividing line between the north and south impact fee districts is Pineda Causeway along the beachside, Viera Boulevard on the east mainland, and the south border of Rockledge in the central mainland.

The switch from four to two districts was supported unanimously by the Local Planning Agency and by a 3-1 vote by the Building and Construction Advisory Committee, with Cunningham voting no.

County commissioners in July voted 4-1 to direct the county's staff to prepare an ordinance to implement the impact fee changes and the remapping of the benefit districts. County Commissioner Trudie Infantini opposed the proposal.

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