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## Manatee commissioners act on economic development program

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BRADENTON — After months of debate and discussion, the Manatee County Commission agreed Tuesday on a plan of incentives and tax relief to promote economic development, especially around Port Manatee.

The plan includes a state job creation incentive program called the Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund, which provides between \$30,000-\$60,000 to companies that bring to the county more than 10 new jobs that pay more than 115 percent of the average annual wage.

The county also will start a similar program modified to attract smaller companies.

Those two programs will be countywide, while several other incentives were approved that will encourage specific industries to locate near the port.

The commission authorized the creation of a tax increment financing, or TIF, district in the Port Encouragement Industrial Zone, which the board designated last year for property along U.S. 41 surrounding the port in north county, and the North County Gateway Overlay District, which extends from the port to just east of Interstate 75, and from the county's northern border to Buckeye Road on the south.

The TIF district permits the county to direct property taxes collected in that area to be spent on projects in the district.

In addition to the TIF district, County Administrator Ed Hunzeker will develop a impact fee exemption plan for industries surrounding the port for the commissioners' approval.

Impact fees are collected on new construction to pay for parks, roads, public safety and schools.

The commission also will look at a tax abatement plan for new industries countywide, where qualified companies will receive relief from property tax.

All of these programs will be brought before the commission within the next 30-60 days for final approval.

That delay did not sit well with a group of developers who asked commissioners to act on the proposals on Tuesday.

"Sometimes you just have to do it," said Dale Weidemiller, a developer and member of the Manatee County Economic Stimulus Working Group.

The working group presented its stimulus plan to the commissioners at a work session last week. It included suspension of impact fees and a tax abatement plan for the entire county.

Carlos Beruff, of Medallion Homes, told commissioners the economic conditions required them to act quickly.

"We're losing young families because they're losing their jobs," Beruff said. "We don't envision ourselves as a Sun City."

He was referring to the retirement community, Sun City Center, east of Ruskin in Hillsborough County.

Beruff said the commission needed to suspend impact fees across the board and not limit them to qualified industries or to a specific area.

Commissioners have delayed any action on impact fees because they are waiting for the completion of a

study, which is due in April.

The Manatee County School Board voted Monday to ask the county commissioners to suspend the impact fees for schools for 12 months.

The Bradenton City Council will hold a public hearing at 6 p.m. today on suspending its impact fees.

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