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Commissioner: Waivers won't work for special assessments

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BRONSON -- Levy County Commissioner Matt Brooks said on Thursday morning (Sept. 13) via a telephone interview that the idea of providing a waiver for residents in cities that have mandatory garbage service will not work, and he would vote against such a motion if it were brought and seconded.

Commissioner Brooks was responding to Chiefland City Manager Mary Ellzey's stated opinion that she thinks people who live in cities with mandatory garbage service should be exempted from the special assessment of \$116 a year that is being assessed against residential property owners countywide, when there is a structure on the property. That includes residents in cities with mandatory garbage collection services, which is where City Manager Ellzey contends it is unfair.

Brooks said the county cannot continue to have a budget deficit where the commissioners keep taking from a reserve fund to help the general fund.

The \$116 annual special assessment to pay for the solid waste transfer station and related garbage-disposal services at the dump -- that is probably going to be approved at the Sept. 18 second and final public hearing -- is not sustainable if cities' residents are able to opt out, Brooks said.

The whole idea of special assessments for countywide fire service, countywide EMS and countywide garbage fees is to spread the cost to everyone in the county, he said.

From his conversations with staff at Government Service Group, Commissioner Brooks said, he sees that if cities were granted a waiver from this fee it would reduce the net revenue to the county by \$500,000 to \$600,000.

With that much lost revenue, Commissioner Brooks said, it would not make sense to have the special assessment.

Brooks said he was elected, in part, because of his promise to the people to operate the county so that the actions are the most fair for the county as a whole. The practice of using the general fund to pay for the shortfall in revenue to the solid waste department is not a sustainable practice, Brooks said.

As for providing a waiver for people of a certain level of annual household income is another option that is not feasible for this plan to work, Brooks said.

Paying \$116 a year for the county to keep its solid waste management program functioning amounts to approximately \$9.67 a month, he added.

(Although the monthly portion of the \$116 is about \$9.67, taxpayers must pay the whole amount for all taxes and special assessments to the county tax collector at one time, except as Levy County Tax Collector Linda Fugate said, if the taxpayer is participating in the quarterly installment plan -- which is available. In those cases, taxpayers make four payments to the tax collector's office.)