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Real Growth Management, Through Funding

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Last week Governor Bush called for real growth management in Florida. The governor's reform program focuses on truly assuring that infrastructure is installed concurrently with new development. For roads this will mean that capacity must be available or under construction within one year of new development being approved. For schools local governments and school boards would be required to work together to provide new facilities within again one year after development begins. For water supplies for new growth must be in place or guaranteed within one year. The governor recognizes that Florida's existing growth management system has failed us. Instead of requiring that infrastructure be installed concurrently with growth, our existing laws have exempted many areas from concurrency requirements. Our governments have not funded their capital improvement programs and instead many have opted to cut local taxes instead. As a result, we have a huge backlog of infrastructure needs that is not the responsibility of new growth. Rather it is the result of existing development not paying its full share of cost. I applaud the governor for focusing on this issue. However, I am troubled by the lack of a realistic and similarly hardheaded approach to funding. The governor correctly points out that local governments have not used every bit of their capacity to fund growth. Some communities could raise an additional \$1.1 billion for roads by raising local gas taxes and other could generate \$2.8 billion by raising local property taxes to their maximum. However, this is not politically realistic. Furthermore, frankly this is a drop in the bucket! Central Florida alone could easily absorb this amount of funding. The governor and the legislature need to focus on funding. Here is a simple, but realistic plan. First, the legislature needs to raise the state gas tax 5 cents per gallon and plow that money into fixing state roads. That is the biggest backlog we have! Second, the legislature needs to allow counties to raise their local gas taxes by up to 5 cents per gallon by a simple majority vote of their county commissions. Third, the state should raise the sales tax by 1 cent to fund schools and to meet the constitutional requirements for reduced class size. Nothing else will do. Otherwise, the legislature and governor are ignoring the will

of the people. Fourth, the legislature needs to require new development to demonstrate that they have a 100-year source of water supply. If new sources are needed, and they are, then new growth should pay for it. This is a real program for funding. Now we will see if the governor and legislature are serious about growth management.

This is Hank Fishkind for 90.7 FM, WMFE News.

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