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## Fees for new homes to increase

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by **Sherry Greenfield**

Staff Writer

May 26, 2005

The Frederick County Builders Association wants to assure homebuyers that a 4.73 percent jump in the impact fees charged to builders slated to take effect July 1 will not automatically increase the cost of a new home.

"The adjustment by itself is nominal," said Bryan Patchan, executive director of the association. "Builders won't go tomorrow and add it on to the price of a new home. This annual increase will not show up tomorrow."

Builders of new homes pay impact fees when they obtain building permits, and the money is used to build schools and libraries, services that are impacted by new homes, thus the term "impact fees."

Each July, the county raises impact fees slightly based on figures released by the building industry publication Engineer News Record's construction index.

The fee is automatically adjusted to account for inflation. The finance department sets the fee based on the report.

Last July, impact fees jumped 4.16 percent. According to Patchan, rising construction costs for materials, such as oil and plywood, have contributed to the 4.73 percent increase slated for this July.

With the upcoming increase, a single-family home impact fee will jump from \$10,016 to \$10,489. On a townhouse, the fee will go from \$6,925 to \$7,252. These fees are the same for each new single-family home and townhouse regardless of the cost of the house.

The Frederick Board of Commissioners on Tuesday had the authority to adjust the automatic jump in fees to a lower percentage number or elect not to increase them at all.

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"Unless the board does otherwise, the increase will go into effect July 1," Commission President John "Lennie" Thompson Jr. (R) told his colleagues.

Commissioners were silent, which meant the new fees take effect July 1.

Commissioner Jan H. Gardner (D) agreed with staff recommendations that the county should update the formula that determines how many students typically live in a single-family home as compared to a townhouse.

Gardner suggested that a study be conducted to determine if the school portion of the impact fee is adequate and if the annual increase is sufficient.

Commissioner Michael L. Cady (R) agreed. "This is critical," he said.

Paul Tischler of Tischler & Associates in Bethesda conducted a study in 2000 that called for the school impact fee portion to be increased and library fees added. Since then, library fees and school impact fees have steadily increased.

In 2000, the impact fee for a single-family home was \$6,906 and a townhouse was \$4,720.

On Gardner's suggestion, the board is considering charging homebuilders an additional fee to help the county's fire and rescue service. The money collected would be used for fire and rescue equipment and stations.

The board contends that fire and rescue companies need more equipment and bigger stations to handle the increase in calls caused by growth.

For the first time, commercial builders may be required to pay an impact fee, since businesses also impact fire and rescue service. They have no impact on new schools and libraries, and thus do not pay fees for them.

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