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Slate Belt engineer: Developers should pay for schools

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A state committee studying impact fees on developers as a way to help school districts facing a tsunami wave of new students listened to 4 hours of testimony Thursday at a hearing in the Slate Belt.

The idea to collect impact fees, money that a school district could charge developers to cover the demands new homes place on the district, is not new.

State Rep. Richard T. Grucela, D-Northampton, who pushed for impact fees six years ago, re-introduced impact fee legislation last year.

After the hearing, neither Grucela nor state Rep. Robert L. Freeman, D-Northampton, would say if they thought the proposed legislation would pass this year.

Most of the testimony they heard inside the Upper Mount Bethel Township building Thursday was in favor of impact fees and against the proposed Marshfield Village development in Upper Mount Bethel that could add 1,257 dwelling units. Opponents say the development would add too many students to the school district's already crowded buildings.

Robert E. Gerwig, a licensed engineer who lives on River Road, said the Marshfield project is a "similar scenario [that] is being played out at many other municipalities across eastern Pennsylvania."

If Marshfield is built, as many as 1,800 new students may come to the district, requiring two new schools over a five -year period, costing \$40 million to \$80 million per school, he said.

"If the existing 2,000 households are forced to finance this kind of imposed tax increase, they could be facing bills that increase every year by 20 to 25 percent per year," he said. "It is even worse when we include our other normal growth figures in addition to this developer.

Mark Mitman, representing the Pennsylvania Builders Association, disagreed. Mitman said his group has seen studies that show new homes "do pay their way, often generating revenues in excess of the expenses they require."

He said his organization fears school boards, "reluctant to control costs, issue a bond or raise taxes," will



see impact fees as "the easy way out."

When asked, Mitman was unable to name a city in which new homes generated more tax income than expenses.

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