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Story

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# Huckaby: Proposed \$6,000 impact fee will help pay for new schools

[Opinion](#) | [Editorial](#)  
Friday, October 19, 2007 at 12:30 am



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constructed daily in subdivisions already permitted, won't have to pay the fee.

**Beaufort County** already charges fees to help pay for road construction, parks and recreational facilities, libraries and stormwater drainage. Until the mid-1990s, the county charged a \$900 school impact fee for every new house built. But that policy was dropped after council members argued successfully that the fee had a negative impact on home construction. Besides, state law didn't specifically allow counties to charge school impact fees.

There's talk about changing state law up in **Columbia** to allow local governments to charge impact fees for school construction, but whether that will ever happen remains to be seen. The real estate and homebuilders' lobbies are strong political entities and they generally don't support bills that mean increased costs.

So what's a community to do? Restrict the number of school children living in the county? Allow only new residents who promise not to procreate? Maybe provide birth control with new home loans and titles?

**Spread around the cost of new schools and get newcomers to pay.**

**BEAUFORT, S.C.** - **Beaufort County** school officials are gearing up for another building bond referendum next year and they're already laying the groundwork by trying to spread the cost.

District administrators have indicated a need for between \$175 to \$200 million to add new schools to the existing 28 facilities, particularly in the southern part of the county where more and more students are forcing the use of more and more mobile units.

The district has been lucky when it comes to voter support for bond referenda. But in an effort not to leave any stone unturned when it comes to courting public opinion, school board members ganged up recently with sympathetic county council members and came up with a funding formula to charge development fees for new home construction.

The idea is to spread around the cost of new schools and get "newcomers" to pay for the new schools that will be needed to educate their children.

Opponents argue that many of the "newcomers" are retirees who don't have children in the school system. Therefore, they should not be required to pay.

But supporters quickly point to studies that say 2.5 service employees - folks who work in the restaurants and grocery stores, landscapers and plumbers - are needed to support the comfortable living style of those retirees. And most of those service workers bring their families along.

Opponents, many in the real estate industry who are concerned about the sluggish local sales market, say the proposed \$6,000 fee per residential unit could kill the sale of what is considered "affordable housing" in **Beaufort County**, already around \$116,000. They argue that the new "development fee" is nothing but an additional tax. They say that increased taxes, regardless of what they're called, are repulsive.

Truth is, the new development fees are going to have limited impact because they apply only to new residents within new developments that require a county zoning change. Any developments that don't need special zoning dispensation, or new homes which are being

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Or maybe insist the elected school officials "use the money they have more wisely?" You hear that a lot in any discussion of school issues. I, for one, have a lot of respect for those elected individuals who spend hours in meetings, trying to come up with solutions to complex questions.

I certainly don't have the answers. I know I have enough problems trying to decide why I'm not using my own money more wisely. Heaven help those who try to come up with solutions that impact the education of our children; it may not seem like it at times but they're the ones struggling with day-to-day reality.

[Lolita Huckaby](#) lives in Beaufort and writes for [Bluffton Today](#). She can be reached at [bftbay@charter.net](mailto:bftbay@charter.net)

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