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A development fee

As farms out in the countryside are sold, and as thousands of new homes are built, there is an aesthetic cost to communities: Beautiful vistas are lost.

But there's a financial cost as well: New roads are needed. So are utilities and schools.

Paying for those things is tough. After all, suburbia is expanding nationally at a rate of 365 acres an hour as folks leave cities and pursue the American housing dream: a four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath house with a garage.

That's what's happening along Jefferson County's edges, and paying for the supporting infrastructure is one of government's great challenges.

Therefore, the Metro Council is considering a very modest proposal: require developers to pay a fee toward better roads. If the ordinance passes, developers in the fastest growing areas will be required to pay \$1,000 for each house, detached condominium and mobile home, \$500 for each attached condo, and \$250 for apartments.

If there's any objection to this proposal, it should be that the fees are too modest. They don't begin to cover the actual cost of fixing narrow, winding roads and other improvements.

This idea isn't new. Other states have charged "impact fees" for years, and they're generally much higher. In California, for example, the average price is \$17,000 per home.

Of course, the developer just tacks the fee on to the cost of the house. If the fee gets too high, it can be a barrier to young people trying to buy their first home.

But it also can become an incentive to buy in areas that are already developed, which saves taxpayers money. High fees also slow suburban sprawl and the traffic congestion and pollution that accompany it.

The fee proposed for Louisville, of course, is too small to affect behavior. But it would at least help finance safer roads.

The Metro Council should approve this proposal. It's so reasonable and fair that even the Home Builders Association is in favor.

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