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Transportation impact fees now law in Lower Macungie

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Developers who build in Lower Macungie can now expect to get hit with thousands of dollars worth of fees when they add traffic to township roads with new homes and businesses.

Township commissioners last week approved a new law that imposes an \$1,800-plus transportation impact fee on builders for every new rush-hour vehicle trip they add to township roads to help fund traffic improvements.

It's a move that some township officials say was a long time in the making after they watched a growth spurt that made Lower Macungie the third-most populated municipality in the Lehigh Valley. Developers have decried the impact fees, which are imposed in several other Lehigh Valley townships, as unfair and unreasonable.



"If you are imposing fees they feel are unreasonable...you're going to be in courts with these folks rather than having their cooperation," said Harold "Bud" Newtown, a Lower Macungie engineer and former PennDOT employee.

The commissioners' decision to impose the fees ended nearly two years of traffic-impact fee study, which was lengthened when township officials realized they inadvertently failed to pass a resolution recognizing its traffic-impact advisory board after the board had done months of work. State law allows municipalities to charge developers a fee for transportation costs if they complete an analysis of future growth and the traffic costs associated with it.

Allentown attorney Joseph A. Zator II, who represents multiple Lower Macungie landowners, has said the township's taxpayers could carry a heavy burden if the township moves forward with \$37 million worth of improvements that are included in the township's transportation improvements plan that is tied to the impact fees.

The plan calls for developers to chip in \$7 million toward that cost. The township and the state Department of Transportation would have to pick up the additional \$30 million, but everyone involved with the plan acknowledges that little if any state money will be available.

Commissioner Deana Zosky voted against the ordinance primarily because the township hasn't budgeted

money toward those improvements.

"How can we collect money from someone else if we're not willing to commit [township money]," she said. "I find that ridiculous, quite frankly, in the business world." She said experts she's spoken to have said impact fees are "not the way to go."

But Douglas Brown, the lone commissioner on the current five-person appointed board who will remain in office come January, called it a "good plan and I'd like to move forward on it."

Township resident Grayson McNair suggested the township could use money from its reserve funds to help pay for road projects.

Developers will have to pay \$1,894 or \$1,839, depending on which part of the township they build, for every peak hour vehicle trip their homes or businesses add to township roads.

Zator reminded commissioners that developers in the past have voluntarily paid for a number of road-improvement projects and that the township shouldn't expect any offers to do that kind of work in the future if the impact fees were approved. He said it may also deter businesses and industries from moving in to Lower Macungie.

Jack Tibbetts, a member of the traffic impact advisory board said "not having a whole bunch of development won't break my heart."

"I'm not going to be sad if we don't add a lot more traffic to our roads," he said.

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