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Big Isle may set school fees

Creating 'impact district' would formalize builders' funding of new facilities

Advertiser Staff

Facing a building boom of new schools in West Hawai'i, the state Department of Education is considering designating the North and South Kohala regions as a "school impact district," the first such zone in the state.

The designation would provide a more formal structure to the current system in which housing developers give the state land and cash to help build schools where the population will increase.

The state Department of Education has estimated that it will have to build nine to 18 new schools in West Hawai'i if all the residential projects envisioned in the region are built.

The state Board of Education's Administrative Services Committee will consider the measure Thursday at 3 p.m. at the Queen Lili'uokalani Building in Honolulu.

In January, Hawai'i County Mayor Billy Kenoi

asked the committee to defer action pending further study and until the economy improves. The DOE earlier held public hearings on the proposal in Kona in November 2008 and April 2009.

Developers already provide what the state terms as "fair-share contributions" of land and cash to the DOE for new schools.

Under the "school impact fee" structure — created by law in 2007 — a developer would pay fees designed to cover the land and 10 percent of the cost for new school construction.

The fees would be a prerequisite to get a county building permit.

The DOE estimated that the fee would be between \$3,000 and \$5,000 for a single-family home and between \$2,000 and \$3,000 for a multifamily unit. Fees would be adjusted every three years.

For projects of 50 or more units, developers would sign an agreement with the DOE to provide land for new schools, or a cash equivalent.

The impact fee program was created by Act 245 in 2007. It requires the Board of Education to designate "school impact districts" where school enrollment growth is expected to create the need for new or expanded schools in the next 25 years.

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