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Builders, please--don't try to sugarcoat what is happening here

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THERE IS NOTHING "erroneous" about the principle of "pay your own way." Despite the protestations of the builders lobby, it is unjust and un-American to dump any of the costs of real-estate development onto the backs of area residents. Gary Parker and the builders lobby would like to convince you otherwise under the guise of "affordable housing."

In his recent commentary ["Counties should work with developers to get affordable housing," June 21] Mr. Parker falls all over himself claiming developers help poor home-buyers--but with no mention that they do so at the expense of poor homeowners. Not much of a surprise there; homeowners are not customers for the builders--home-buyers are.

What is contemptible is their use of phrases like "trying to solve" our communities' problems to mask unmitigated, community-killing greed. Their affordable-housing logic works only if we pretend that all current homeowners are wealthy, and all new home-buyers are poor.

The reality is that many area homeowners are struggling young families, or elderly on fixed incomes, whereas many new home-buyers are selling high-priced homes in Northern Virginia to get more land here.

As long as growth doesn't pay its own way, no housing is affordable in the long run--because our real-estate taxes must keep going up to pay for all the infrastructure that the developers fail to provide for their projects.

The development lobby has spent fortunes in the General Assembly to maintain that injustice. But that's OK with them, and they don't seem to mind the side effects (the "benefits" Mr. Parker didn't mention)--pushing homeowners into poverty, ruining our air, increasing traffic congestion, degrading our water supply, compounding teen deaths on the roads, etc.--because it is good for business.

The only tool that can stop this injustice is an impact-fee policy. It should really be called a "pay your own way" policy, because "impact fee" suggests a new tax, whereas "pay your own way" describes shifting the costs of development onto those who demand it and off the backs of those who neither asked for nor desire it.

I think the right to be able to afford to stay in your own home and the right to prevent your homeland from being ruined by inadequate infrastructure are important aspects of affordable housing. Please contact your General Assembly representatives to push for statewide site-specific impact-fee legislation that will require every development--industrial, residential, or commercial--to pay its own way 100 percent.

When the development lobby stops trying to convince us that we homeowners "benefit" from their activity, gets behind fair impact-fee legislation, and makes affordable-housing contributions rather than campaign contributions, then they will earn the "trust and respect" Mr. Parker now finds lacking.

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