



[Return to story](#)

## Coalition pushes for impact fees

March 16, 2005 1:08 am

By JODI BIZAR

New charge would pay for school construction

Stafford County Supervisor Pete Fields, who was recently elected chairman of the High Growth Coalition, has an idea to ease the financial burden on the area's schools.

He wants builders to pay an impact fee to finance new school construction.

"It'll be an uphill battle," Fields said, but added it's an issue well worth the fight.

Right now, county governments do not have the right to charge those fees. But Fields says Stafford was able to get a transportation impact fee, so now it should attempt to get an impact fee to pay for new school construction.

Such a fee, he says, will be a big plus for a county that next fiscal year will be paying about \$25 million debt service for new school construction.

The way the fee would work is builders, applying for permits to make new subdivisions, would be charged an amount to cover the cost of new school construction.

"With high schools costing \$41 million dollars a pop, this could be a huge savings," Fields said.

He said the county would still be responsible for the tab of additional teachers and other educational costs but the infrastructure would be paid for through the impact fee.

Asking state lawmakers to give the county the right to charge impact fees is not a new venture. The General Assembly repeatedly has pushed aside attempts from the Virginia Association of Counties, the Virginia Municipal League and other groups to allow impact fees.

But Fields has a new strategy to get those fees--he's going to solicit the builders to join the fight.

"They have an incentive in this, too," he said. "This could be profitable for them as well."

Fields says Stafford's quality of life plays a roll in what builders can charge for new homes. If quality of life issues, such as education, do not keep pace with the growth, Stafford is not the kind of place people will want to live.

"I want to talk to the businesses and builders, and collectively we can show we're serious," Fields said.

He said the Board of Supervisors would be more apt to approve new construction if it knew there would be enough school facilities to meet the needs of the families moving in.

The High Growth Coalition is made up of several localities representing more than 3.5 million Virginians. The group consists of elected officials from high growth areas, such as Stafford, which is increasing in size by about 5 percent a year.

The coalition lobbies for state policy and legislation that strengthens local authority.

"Involvement in the High Growth Coalition is critical for us to keep legislators informed of the challenges we face," said Bruce Goodson, who was recently elected vice chair. Goodson is on the James City County Board of Supervisors.

To reach JODI BIZAR: 374-5000, ext. 5627 [jbizar@freelancestar.com](mailto:jbizar@freelancestar.com)

---

Copyright 2005 The Free Lance-Star Publishing Company.