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Commission appears split on impact fee decision

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CHARLES TOWN, W.Va. - With a possible vote on the matter set for Thursday, opinions are still mixed among members of the Jefferson County Commission on whether Huntfield developers should be granted a \$6 million break in school impact fees for a senior living community they are proposing.

Commission member Greg Corliss said he is going to vote for the exemption because he believes the county is legally obligated to give it, while other commission members continue to have doubts about the idea.

Corliss said he plans to vote for the exemption because Jefferson County Prosecuting Attorney Michael D. Thompson has indicated it would be "illegal" to not give the exemption.

Corliss said he believes covenants for the proposed Four Seasons at Huntfield development can be crafted in a way to guarantee no children will live there.

Developers of the sprawling Huntfield development have said they do not believe they should have to pay school impact fees for the proposed 821-home Four Seasons at Huntfield because residents must be at least 55 years old and no children will be allowed to live in the homes.

School impact fees are collected from developers for every house built to help pay for school facilities needed because of population growth.

Jefferson County School officials have objected to the fee waiver, saying they have doubts about the ability to enforce the development's covenants that would prohibit children from living in Four Seasons at Huntfield.

County Commission members debated the issues surrounding the exemption request at their meeting last Thursday and said the issue could be decided during their regular meeting Thursday.

Commission member Dale Manuel said he will vote against the exemption, saying nothing in local impact fee agreements allow for such exemptions.

Besides, Manuel said he would rather vote for keeping \$6 million for the school system as opposed to a "6 million fee discount for a major corporation."

Commission President Rusty Morgan said Tuesday he has not made up his mind about whether to give the exemption. Morgan said the more he studies the issue, the more complex it gets.

Morgan said he also has learned that many people hate the idea of giving the exemption.

"It's a political hot potato," Morgan said.

Commission member Jane Tabb declined Tuesday to say how she might vote.

"I want to re-read everything one more time," Tabb said.

Commission member Jim Surkamp also declined to say Tuesday how he plans to vote on the exemption request, but said he has concerns about it.

Surkamp said he has a problem with one segment of the county not paying the fee while others do and said the covenants prohibiting children from living in the senior living community could be changed by residents there over time.

The school impact fee for every single-family home is \$8,562. The fee for town houses and duplexes is \$6,686 and the fee for each multi-family unit is \$4,858.

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