

The Post and Courier

Council reactivates impact fee question

Chairman Feltner says action in response to citizens' group

By [Bo Petersen](#)

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SUMMERVILLE -- Transportation impact fees haven't hit the wall yet in Dorchester County.

Less than a month ago, County Council postponed "for at least a year" asking its planning commission to recommend whether and how to impose the fees to improve roads. Now, council is poised to go do it. In an unusual move, Council Chairman Jamie Feltner put on the county planning commission's agenda a request from the commission that council ask for the study. The commission passed the request on a 4-1 vote.

Feltner said he was responding to concerns from commission members and a citizens' advisory council on transportation. Commission Chairman Robert Pratt, the lone "no" vote, called it a procedural violation.

"We did not initiate this. We did not start the discussion, and it's not appropriate for us to bring it back to council when they had voted 4-3 to postpone it," Pratt said.

The votes might now be in place to overturn the earlier vote.

Councilman Richard Rosebrock said he originally opposed the plan because the commission faced staff absences and turnover and because a transportation master plan that would make recommendations on the fees hadn't been completed.

"I've gotten assurances that everything is going to work out OK,"

Rosebrock said.

Councilman Larry Hargett said he plans to ask for a new vote because the plan is about to be completed.

Roiling underneath this turmoil is a running skirmish over impact fees themselves, with political ramifications in a community that consistently votes against tax and referendum initiatives. The 4-3 council vote came after forceful opposition from seven people representing home-building interests. The opposition came nearly a year after the county first proposed impact fees to help pay for new road projects.

It also came on the heels of the Charleston-Trident Home Builders Association suing Dorchester District 2 schools to stop a recently enacted impact fee to pay for new schools. The group said the fees unfairly hamper development. Impact-fee supporters say it's only fair for new residents to pay for new services. The discussions so far have never reached the stage to determine how much the fees would be.

The opposition emerged after council last year passed a comprehensive plan update that called for the fees.

Coming in a time of revenue and funding cutbacks, the tug-of-war over impact fees has bred hard feelings among opponents, supporters and public officials faced with paying for the demand on roads, schools and other infrastructure. Much of the demand is due to a surge in population in recent years, a trend that is expected to boom again as the recession ends and home building picks up.



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The commission and committee members Feltner heard from "were frankly aggravated and disappointed the council wasn't doing what they said they would do in the comprehensive plan," he said. "Things are picking up. Housing sales have increased. (New residents) will come to Dorchester County; they will live in Dorchester County. How do you get them back and forth from schools and work and how do you pay for it?"

The planning commission request will be on council's Jan. 4 agenda, County Administrator Jason Ward said. The transportation study is expected to be completed in time for the Jan. 19 meeting.

Reach **Bo Petersen** at 937-5744 or bpetersen@postandcourier.com.

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