

# THE DURANGO HERALD

## County commissioners drop road fees

**Hotter and Riddle worry levies too much in a sour economy**

by Katie Burford  
Herald Staff Writer

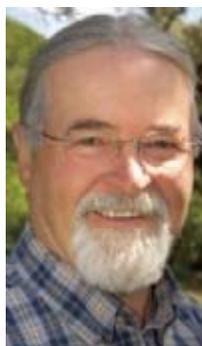
Article Last Updated; Wednesday, May 12, 2010 12:00AM



Hotter



Riddle



White

### Fees dropped for Three Springs

La Plata county's failure to pass a countywide road-impact fee frees

La Plata County will not impose road-impact fees on new development after county commissioners failed to come to an agreement on the proposal.

After about an hour of heated debate, Commissioner Kellie Hotter, who has repeatedly expressed her opposition to the fees, moved to drop the proposal. Hotter and Commissioner Joelle Riddle voted in favor of the motion. Commissioner Wally White voted against it.

Opponents of the fee feared it would slow building, discourage new businesses and dissuade existing ones from expanding. Proponents argued it would shift the burden of paying for road improvements from all taxpayers to developers.

In the end, it came down to a question of numbers.

A 2007 study commissioned by the county estimated the road cost for different kinds of development. For example, the net cost for a single-family dwelling of 2,500 square feet or more is \$8,460.

The county's original proposal, which closely followed the fee schedule adopted by the city of Durango in 2008, was to charge developers 60 percent of the county's net road cost.

On Tuesday, Riddle, who initially favored the fee but later expressed reservations, proposed dropping the percentage to 10 percent.

Reading from a prepared statement, she said, "I have come to believe the cost of growth should be paid for by all of the residents of the county. ... I think that we should realize that there are people in our community who need jobs, and there are others in our community who create them."

White countered with a proposal to set the fee at 40 percent of the net cost and have it phase in over five years on a curve that starts slowly and accelerates toward the end.

He said the days when the county could rely primarily on tax revenue from natural-gas production are over.

Three Springs development from paying fees it agreed to pay five years ago under a development agreement with the county.

The county does not have to forfeit more than \$1 million in fees that already have been collected, but it will not receive an additional \$2 million or more it would have received as the rest of the development is built.

The county had until this week to pass a countywide fee or release Three Springs from its obligation.

– Katie Burford

"We need to, in essence, join the rest of the world," he said.

He said the 40 percent level would put La Plata County close to the statewide average for local impact fees.

Riddle tried to get White to agree to the lower fee, but he said his proposal already represented a compromise.

"I think 10 percent is way too low," he said. "It's a drop in the bucket."

She appealed to Hotter.

"Commissioner Hotter, I don't want any more than 10 percent," she said. "None?"

Hotter shook her head.

"How can we kick our constituents when they're down?" Hotter asked.

On a couple of occasions, Hotter referred to Riddle's reservations about the fee, which she first voiced at last week's meeting as her "ah-ha moment."

Riddle protested the characterization.

"Would you stop saying that?" she asked.

Hotter responded, "Call it whatever you want, but I'm glad you understand that, and I'm not trying to be offensive."

After the vote, Riddle admonished her fellow commissioners.

"I really think we are doing a disservice to our community by not compromising," she said.

White said he, too, was disappointed.

"I have put forward what I felt to be a compromise," he said.

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1. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 10:25:47 AM

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**Ron says...**

Clearly a double standard going on here. Nice all of you who "want the horrible developers to pay thier own way" got here and moved into houses that paid no "road impact" fees, once again want something for nothing. The road impact study that was done was flawed from the begining, because it did not take into account the number of homes and businesses that paid no impact fees because gas industry monies were coming in. Do you not use the county's roads ? Aparently you all walk every where ? If this "fee" (tax ?) would have past it would effectively halt just about all development, now no fee is collected, niether are sales taxes on materials, nor new property taxes, then you are left with nothing but a mil levy increase.

Instead of complaining about Joelle Riddle and Kellie Hotter why don't you ask Wally White, why when building permits are so low do we need the same amount of planning and building department staff ? Why are we wasting taxpayer's money having meetings and discussion about "non-conforming properties" when there are no properties at issue ? Perhaps a little make work project for the planning and legal staff ? I live in Wally's district and never when I have communicated with the County Commissioners have I ever heard from him first. He has complete disregard for the majority of people in the southeast county that he is suppose to be representing. Go ahead keep Wally in there and see where your taxes go. We are hemorrhaging jobs in this county, ask yourself, who is going to be left to service your car, fix your plumbing and electrical, re-finish or tile your floor ?

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2. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 9:52:21 AM

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**MATT** says...

Maybe if we had a real economic base in the form of good paying jobs, construction wouldn't be so much of a priority here in Durango. Tourism and construction are foundations made of sand when it comes to long term economic viability. Economic downturns make those things very shaky and undependable when people need stability the most during hard times. Take a look at Greece: most of their economy is based on tourism, and look where that got them in the long run.

We need manufacturing jobs, or other forms of jobs, in our county if we want to have a stable, viable, local economy.

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3. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 9:10:36 AM

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**Been Here Since Birth** says...

RIGHT ON JOANIE!!!

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4. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 8:56:49 AM

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**Sam** says...

I think the worry about development is a pipe dream. There will be no development with the current economy. Check the Building permits....hardly any. The day of speculative building is over. No money is available for development. (Of course we still have plenty of planning and building Department employees on the County and City Payroll)

The only ones to pay are the property taxpayers. Wait until you get your next property tax bill. The Democrats and anti progress politicians like Wally White have killed our main source of revenue, the Well and Gas industry. They have successfully killed construction of any kind, which is a main source of employment.

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5. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 8:31:39 AM

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**joanie** says...

Mr. White remarks about "joining the rest of the world" shows me he is a very dangerous progressive. Has he not been following "The rest of the world" and how their attempts at taxing and feeing people to death have caused countries to crumble???? Look at Greece for goodness sakes. He needs to be voted out and replaced with a common sense business growth oriented person who doesn't have a one world view. Why should one group of people have the burdeon of most of the costs when everybody will use it. I know Mr. White is thrilled about oil & gas going away now he wants the evil employers going away. What a fool.

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6. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 7:52:44 AM

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**Cheryl** says...

I think Hotter is right. The economy is so poor right now, the county, state and National levels of legislature cannot keep "kicking people in the teeth", I know people who are losing their homes, their vehicles and their livliehood with this recession.I see people leaving the state to find jobs, that were lost and we should have kept in the gas and oil fields in La Plata county. That is where the county and state screwed up, what a huge loss of revenue to the county, stupid, stupid, move on the part of the state and county governments. So, now lets just raise everything we can to cover our butts and work on trying to make up the monies and revenues lost. We have to work at keeping our county a little more balanced. Raising fees, losing jobs, raising taxes, losing jobs, raising prices, losing jobs. Aren't we going the wrong direction for creating jobs in our county? This was a good decision.

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7. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 7:50:40 AM

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**Margaret** says...

It should come as no surprise that Joelle Riddle, who campaigned as a Smart Growth candidate, should flip - now expecting taxpayers to pay the cost of growth. Did she really understand the issue?

Thanks to Kelli Hotter who's never made a secret of her disdain for taxpayers and her love for developers, the Commission's decision to release Three Springs from its financial commitment to pay their fair share of impacts that will clearly occur on county roads is outrageous.

How long will it take for those costs to be passed on to our property tax - or cuts in county services?

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8. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 7:39:06 AM

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**Reality says...**

Everyone currently living in this county got here without paying an impact fee. Drive around and look at our road system, and infrastructure. While people will always want more I'd say its pretty darn good. And all of this is in place without an impact fee nor is the county under a mountain of debt. Obviously growth in one way or another is paying its own way or this would not be so. With the slow down in oil and gas this community better be growing or it will be dying, and one day not too many years from now when all that is left here is art shops, eateries, and high end housing we will all be to blame for not supporting some reasonable growth.

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9. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 7:29:39 AM

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**Powrider686 says...**

Just another big money republican steam rolling any thought of them paying for the roads and areas that they develop. Of course taxpayers should pay for the cost of the roads while the developers reap huge profits without having to pay a dime. Yea right. That's what Durango voters get for not understanding who they're voting into office. Drill, build, drill, build and let the taxpayers pay for it. Sweet. That's why i'm leaving.

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10. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 7:14:43 AM

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**Disgust says...**

This ruling does not eliminate the costs of providing services to these new developments, just who pays for them. We taxpayers and renters as a whole will now pay for these expenses instead of the developers who will be reaping the profits. Once again a Republican commissioner gives a taxpayer subsidy to her developer friends. No wonder the real estate and development community is paying to elect Lieb.

If you think this is outrageous, wait until you see all the yellow Caterpillar earthmovers paying our paradise if Lieb is elected. Profits for the Lieb family and the development expenses paid by us taxpayers and renters.

Wake up people! There is a reason why Hotter Development and Construction Company and Bobby Lieb development want to be the ones approving development!

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11. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 6:57:36 AM

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**Droparent says...**

There should be some interesting comments here today.

Isn't this exactly like bailing out banks, auto manufacturers etc. that all the tea baggers are railing about? I'm not saying suspending the fees at this time is not a bad idea but this is a perfect example of tax payers getting stuck with the "real" cost of development. Folks need to

wake up to understand that these are complex problems the country is faced with. No "simple" "common sense" answers.

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12. Wednesday, May 12, 2010  
at 6:32:49 AM

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**Disbelief!** says...

Wally is right; it's time for La Plata County to join the 21st century and impose fees on the developers who are creating this mess! Why should taxpayers always have to pick up the tab and subsidize the obscene profits of a few? Commissioners Hotter and Riddle are WAY OFF here and clearly beholden to special interests. I'm sure Three-Springs is laughing all the way to the bank, and developers everywhere are toasting their success. Pathetic.

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