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Friday, 12/16/05

## County Commission studies impact tax

*Isbell says county should scrap adequate facilities tax*

By Katrina Cornwell  
Staff Writer

Sumner County Tax Assessor John Isbell thinks the county should scrap the adequate facilities tax altogether.

But some county commissioners say the county depends on this revenue source to build schools, and if it goes away, something will have to take its place.

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The Sumner County Commission's legislative committee has recommended the formation of

an ad hoc committee to study whether to keep the adequate facilities tax or strike down this fee.

The full commission will have to vote Monday to authorize this committee before it can be officially assembled.

The discussion on the adequate facilities tax was sparked by a request of the Sumner County School board to double this tax to pay for the school building program.

What this tax means for home buyers is higher costs.

And it places the responsibility of paying for new schools on builders and purchasers of new homes and industries in the county.

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Isbell said he believes in building schools but the money shouldn't come from a tax imposed on new construction.

"Where I disagree is where we're getting the money from," Isbell told members of the county commission's legislative committee Monday.

"You're penalizing (residents) for moving into a new home."

Sumner County added \$2.3 million in tax growth in 2005 after the sales ration was applied, Isbell said.

"We need to take a step back and look at the impact fee and how punitive it is," he said. "We should strike it out and learn to live within the means of the growth."

Sumner County Commission Chairman Steve Botts said the county is living within its means.

"Our means includes the adequate facilities tax," Botts said. "This county has expanded its means...It was a hard fought battle to get it...However, I'm against increasing it."

At this time, there is a 70-cent charge per gross square foot on new residential construction and a 40-cent charge per gross square foot on industrial construction. Sumner schools have asked the county to double that tax to pay for new schools.

There is no adequate facilities tax on commercial construction.

Charles Haynes, owner of Haynes Realty, said imposing a conveyance tax might be a better source of revenue than the adequate facilities tax.

"A conveyance tax, whenever a title is transferred for property, would create more money instead of just having a tax that produces a one-time source of money," said Haynes, who is also a developer.

Currently, home buyers pay this fee, called a transfer tax or conveyance tax, when purchasing property.

A home buyer would pay \$370 in transfer or conveyance fees to the state on a \$100,000 home, said Sumner County Register of Deeds Pam Whitaker.

Sumner County Law Director Leah Dennen said counties have attempted to add their own conveyance taxes on top of the state's fee but the Tennessee General Assembly never approved it.

Builder Randy Jones does not believe new home buyers should be penalized with an increase in the adequate facilities tax.

Currently, home buyers pay about \$1,050 for 1,500 square feet of living space.

"What happens if the economy slows and home sales dry up?" Jones asked.

Some officials and developers believe Sumner County may be the next “hot spot” for growth in Middle Tennessee.

That growth indicates that the adequate facilities tax isn’t putting the brakes on home construction here, Botts said.

“They can’t build them fast enough in this county,” he said.

Staff writer John Bailey contributed information to this report.

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