



County Mulls Impact Fee To Help Pay For Schools

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11/03/2005 SNOW HILL – The imposition of school impact fees on new residential development to accommodate the cost of recent school improvements within Worcester County took a small step toward authorization this week when the County Commissioners unanimously voted to transfer the request to amend legislation before an eventual public hearing on the issue is scheduled.

By definition, according to TischlerBise Fiscal, Economic and Planning Consultants President Paul Tischler, an impact fee is a one-time payment used to construct system improvements needed to accommodate new development that represents new growth's fair share of capital facility needs.

Currently, TischlerBise based the proposed impact fee in Worcester County upon an adopted level of service for each type of school and the current cost to provide capital improvements, and if approved, the impact fee revenues will be used to expand and provide additional or expanded public school facilities or improvements.

Therefore, if this request is approved, all occupants of new single- and multi-family residential units thereafter will be required to pay impact fees upon the collection of their building permits in order to pay for new development within the county's school system.

Although the proposal is in its early stages, the maximum impact fee amounts for each type of new residential home has been estimated to total \$5,942 for single-family detached and attached housing units, \$2,514 for moderate-intensity multi-family units, \$355 for higher-intensity multi-family units and \$3,471 for mobile homes and all other units.

According to Tischler, the figures are the maximum estimates based upon methodologies, levels of service and costs for the capital improvements that have been identified within the county so far and could be subject to change when and if the actual fees are assessed.

When bouncing the request off of the commissioners at Tuesday's meeting, there were mixed opinions on whether these fees should be imposed upon all new residential homeowners.

"There is not a bigger supporter of the school system than I am, but the effect of impact fees on single-family residents concerns me," said Commissioner Bud Church of one of the potential issues that could result from the implementation of the charges.

In addition to the affordability concern, there was also some discussion over how reasonable it is to impose school impact fees on senior citizens and seasonal residents who do not have children attending school within this county.

In response to those concerns, Tischler said that even if the impact fees are withheld, the financial backing for school improvements must still derive from somewhere if it is going to be possible for them to happen.

"If these figures are not paid through impact fees, the level of service will decrease for kids or you'll have to make it up somewhere else," said Tischler.

County Attorney Ed Hammond also pointed out that even those who are not directly involved with the school system still receive benefits from those who do attend public schools through the public services they provide within the community.

"You've got to set aside units for people to wait on rich people, so to speak," he said.

According to Commission President Sonny Bloxom, the purpose of impact fees is to serve every member of the county, not just those who the charge directly affects.

"We are doing ours solely for the schools, which is to benefit the entire county," he said.

Conclusively, the commissioners unanimously decided to put amending legislation on the request so that a public hearing can be eventually scheduled in order to come to an ultimate decision on whether or not to accept it.

According to Tischler, the fee is simply a part of the cost of buying new residential land and should be sanctioned to help overall managed growth within the county.

“This impact fee needs to be paid because it goes with land and it goes with the house,” he said. “If you’re occupying that new house, you’re freeing up an existing house, and that evens out.”

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