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County impact fees encourage sprawl

Thurston County officials have taken the next step to bring the county's land use and zoning laws in line with mandates in the state Growth Management Plan.

As county commisioners seek to stop urban sprawl and protect farms and large parcels of rural property from development, they should take a hard look at the impact fees the county charges.

Olympia Master Builders recently published a chart comparing impact fees in South Sound jurisdictions. The Master Builders used as their sample a single-family, 2,000-square-foot home with a 400-square-foot garage. A builder would pay \$18,945 in building and impact fees in the city of Olympia. That same home would generate \$16,622 in fees in Tumwater and \$14,004 in Lacey, according to the Master Builders.

The fee in the county? Just \$6,172, and most of that — \$4,241 — is a school impact fee.

Think about it. If you were a builder, where would you rather construct that 2,000-square-foot home — in Olympia, where you would pay almost \$19,000 in upfront fees, or the county, at just more than \$6,000? Aren't the county's low impact fees encouraging urban sprawl?
