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Culpeper nixes transportation fees

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Swayed in part by public opinion, the Culpeper County Board of Supervisors last night voted against imposing a countywide transportation impact fee.

The margin was razor thin, 4-3, and the debate was at times heated. But in the end the majority felt that the proposed fees would both drive business and industry away and also infringe upon individual property rights.

"If I knew I could build my bank 10 miles down the road for a quarter of a million dollars less, I'd be a hell of a bad businessman if I didn't do it," said Chairman Bill Chase.

But Supervisor Brad Rosenberger said the county was missing the boat if it didn't pass the measure. "This affects by-right development," he said, arguing that there are thousands of such building lots on the books that are not subject to rezoning and associated proffers.

That, however, was the point that was sounded loudest during a public hearing. Several speakers said they didn't fancy paying a \$2,176 traffic impact fee in addition to building permits to construct a home on land they had owned for years.

"I do not feel this to be fair and equitable to people who have been living and paying taxes in the county for years, especially when this county can pay a man \$150,000 for sitting in the shade," argued Harris Burke.

Burke was referring to the School Board's current arrangement with ousted superintendent David Cox.

Under the transportation impact fee legislation, monies collected would be directed to specifically designated road projects.

But Supervisor Steve Nixon argued that even during the midst of Culpeper's recent boom, total fees from the 1,300 houses built during the best year would have generated only enough money to pave 2.5 miles of road. "And how do you tell the guy who builds at the end of the road that although he's paid the traffic impact fee, we still won't pave his road?"

Supervisor Sue Hansohn said that proffers would bring in far more revenue than transportation impact fees and that businesses would likely lower proffers if impact fees were charged.

Supervisor Tom Underwood said it was not fair to exempt public schools from the impact fees while forcing private schools to pay them.

Hospitals, libraries, churches and fire and police stations would also have been exempt.

Hansohn, Chase, Nixon and Underwood voted against the impact fees while Aylor, Rosenberger and Steve Walker voted for them.

Had Culpeper passed the measure, it would have been the first jurisdiction in the state to do so under the recently enacted legislation.

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