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Frederick County waives impact fees for affordable housing

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Affordable housing in Frederick County will not be charged for impact fees as of next year.

And one commissioner who will be serving on the next Board of County Commissioners hinted all impact fees could be reduced or eliminated when the new board takes office.

The commissioners approved a fee waiver Tuesday evening for affordable housing projects by a 3-2 vote.

Under the waiver, the projects need to be developed by a nonprofit organization that develops affordable housing for homeowners at or below an income level of 60 percent of the median income. The waiver will be in effect for building permits issued after Jan. 1, 2011.

Ron Cramer, executive director of Frederick County Habitat for Humanity and vice chairman of the Affordable Housing Council, told the commissioners there is a tremendous shortage of affordable housing in Frederick County.

"Impact fees at this point in time are a huge roadblock for us to move forward in building affordable homes," Cramer said.

Before a shovel is placed in the ground, Habitat has to raise \$30,000 to pay for fees, he said.

The waiver was opposed by Commissioner John L. Thompson Jr. and Commissioner David Gray, both Republicans.

"This is an expenditure that will have to be made up by the general taxpayers of Frederick County," Thompson said.

He lamented the lack of conservatives in government.

"I hate it when I'm right," Thompson said.

Gray took issue with the income level. A family of four with a median income of about \$60,000 would qualify for the waiver, Gray said.

The other Republican on the board, Blaine Young, supported the waiver. He responded to Thompson's comments about conservatives.

"Don't worry, we may get rid of impact fees for everybody, Commissioner Thompson," Young said.

Young will likely serve as president of the next board, which will include Gray and three new Republicans.

Outside the meeting, he said the next board should consider having impact fees studied.

"We should also look at what Washington County did in giving some type of relief on these types of fees to stimulate the housing market," Young said.

Commissioners President Jan Gardner said the affordable housing waiver would be limited in scope and would not have a big impact on the county's capital improvements budget, where impact fee proceeds go.

"Here we're trading and balancing legitimate public needs and the public good," Gardner said. "While there is a need for us to collect money to have public schools and public libraries, there is also a need for affordable housing."

If the county were to eliminate or reduce impact fees for everyone, Gardner said it would impact the schools and library capital budgets.

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