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Kane County renews impact fee debate with push for cut

By James Fuller

Kane County officials restarted the debate on what fees to charge new development in the county Tuesday with a renewed push for a major reduction.

The charges, known as impact fees, are imposed to hold new development accountable for the increased burden placed on roads because of the additional traffic created by new homes and businesses. But the county has seen little of either of those kinds of development during the downturn in the economy. In response, board members recently renewed their legal authority to have impact fees with promises to explore the amount of fees in more detail.

Several local communities have sent letters pushing the county to lower the fees in hopes of spurring development. But county lawyers have said there is no legal justification for lowering the impact fees to stimulate the economy and create local jobs. The fees must be fairly tied to the actual need for road improvements. That's left some county board members who see the fees as an impairment to the economy looking for ways to legally lower the fees.

"I'm in favor of fees when there's impact," said board member Mike Donahue. "When that impact goes away I don't think we should continue to collect the fee."

Donahue said traffic projections from five years ago haven't been realized.

But board member Cathy Hurlbut is among a group of board members who believes the county needs the impact fee money for future road improvements. Without the impact fees, the road money must come from somewhere including, possibly, local taxpayers. More traffic, even if it was less than expected, is still more traffic, Hurlbut said.

"Every time you put a new car on the road, there is an impact," Hurlbut said. "The question is whether or not development should pay for part of the impact."

Donahue pitched a plan to reduce the impact fee to 10 percent from about 50 percent (based on the number of automobile trips a development is expected to generate), meaning the money collected would pay for about 10 percent of the damage or road improvements needed by the creation of the new commercial or residential development. The county's Transportation Committee will debate that plan next month.

Kane and DuPage are the only local counties that charge an impact fee. Kane County raked in about \$22 million in impact fees during the past 10 years.

