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New school impact fee coming on Big Island

By Kim Eaton
West Hawaii Today

The state's education department will soon have the authority to impose impact fees on all West Hawaii developments. The Board of Education on Thursday voted 8-3 in favor of implementing the West Hawaii School Impact Fee District. The plan will go into effect in July.

Allowed by legislation passed by the 2007 Legislature, the school impact fee will require West Hawaii housing developers to pay a school construction fee of \$3,359 per single family unit and \$1,796 per multifamily dwelling, as well as a land donation or fee in lieu of land, which will be determined by the land's appraisal value.

Impact fees would be charged to all new single-family and multifamily housing in the proposed district, which includes areas served by Waimea Elementary, Waikoloa Elementary, Konawaena Elementary and all Kealakehe complex schools.

"This is a good thing. It's probably going to have an impact on developer costs and purchase of homes, but in terms of a fair exchange and giving back to the community, it's going to help

the schools get built and develop the infrastructure West Hawaii needs," West Hawaii Complex Area Superintendent Art Souza said.


Not everyone was quite as optimistic about the plan as Souza. Board of Education Second Vice Chairwoman Karen Knudsen said Hawaii County officials, while not against the overall concept, expressed concern about how the program would be implemented. Knudsen voted against the proposal, claiming she wanted to respect Mayor Billy Kenoi's request that the board postpone implementation a while longer.

County Department of Planning Director Bobby Jean Leithead-Todd was unavailable for comment Friday. Bobby Command -- Kenoi's executive assistant who Knudsen said testified against the fee on the county's behalf -- and Kenoi did not return phone messages Friday.

The impact fee is meant to provide land for future school sites and cover about 10 percent of the construction costs, using a formula that looks at the number of residential units by type, land and school construction cost per student, geographic differences in construction costs, the average number of students generated per unit and the value of land being developed.

Money collected must be spent in the respective districts, and can only be spent on construction of new buildings or expansion of current facilities. The fees will go into a trust fund until the Legislature appropriates the money for projects.

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Souza said in the next 25 years there will be a "huge expansion" in West Hawaii. He anticipates North Kona alone will need at least one, possibly two, new elementary schools and potentially a new high school. Waikoloa will also see continued growth, he added.

"In the next 20 to 25 years, I suspect West Hawaii will be the fastest growing area in the state," he said.

The West Hawaii School Impact District is the first area to be considered by the education board, but there are plans to create additional impact districts in other parts of the state where appropriate, Knudsen said.

The department's current process uses a fair-share program where the Land Use Commission or Planning Commission would impose conditions on developers during the rezoning process. The impact fee law gives the education department power to impose its own impact fees to all development, not just that which required a change in zoning, and puts the process into law.

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