

## Panel looks at school construction alternatives

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With state funding an uncertainty and the county's population on the rise, a panel of experts Monday explored alternative ways of funding school construction and renovation.

The discussion, sponsored by The PTA Council of Frederick County, brought together school and county officials as well as a representative from the building community, to look at new ways to fund schools at a time when many are aging and overcrowded.

Rodgers Consulting President Mark Friis, representing developers, said that there should be a dedicated source of income to school construction, similar to a state-level gas tax that benefits transportation.

Friis also mentioned the path that developers are forging in working with the schools and the county to help fund school projects, such as a recent addition to Tuscarora High School and a planned addition to Crestwood Middle School.

"Whether you like it or not, developers are your partners," he said. "It's easy for some in Winchester Hall [the seat of county government] to demonize [developers] but we should work together to fund infrastructure."

County Commissioner Michael L. Cady (R) offered an alternative: doubling the impact fee on new home construction. He also echoed Friis' call for a dedicated source of funds to renovate or modernize schools, as impact fees are used for new schools only.

Cady felt the answer was to dedicate part of the county's recordation tax to the effort.

"The resale of existing homes ... can pay for the restructuring of schools," he said.

Representing the school system, both Superintendent Linda D. Burgee and past school board President Bonnie M. Borsa discussed developer-funded school projects, noting that the board has developed guidelines to evaluate all proposals that come before them.

Borsa said that the concept, new in Frederick County and in Maryland, is "revolutionary" and should be considered as an alternative.

For more on this story, please see the March 30 print edition of The Gazette.

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