

# POCONO RECORD

[Click here to print this article](#) | [Go back to article](#)

## Pass impact fees bill

April 30, 2006

A year ago, this newspaper heartily endorsed the imposition of impact fees on new development. Now a few legislators in the Pennsylvania General Assembly have put together a bill that authorizes officials in fast-growing municipalities to levy impact fees — up to \$13,000 per house, and up to \$26,000 per house in large-scale new developments. This measure would go a long way toward stemming the spiraling school property taxes in the Poconos, where every new residential development sends shivers up the spines of those watching school budgets. And given recent events in the Poconos, impact fees are needed more than ever before.

The bill's sponsors hail from a few fast-growing central Pennsylvania counties. But altogether, 17 of the 67 Pennsylvania counties, including Pike and Monroe, meet the definition in the bill, and state Rep. Mario Scavello, R-176, has signed on to the bill as a co-sponsor. State Rep. John Siptroth, D-189, also understands their value. As a supervisor in Smithfield Township, Siptroth lobbied state legislators to authorize impact fees.

Impact fees, which are essentially a one-time tax, make sense in fast-growing areas because they generate much-needed revenues to help pay for the costs of growth. Impact fees help fund the new or improved roads, water and sewer system, expanded police and fire services and schools that accompany or follow new growth. Impact fees ease the increased tax burden that falls on existing property owners, a burden that weighs especially heavily on retirees and other fixed-income property owners.

Impact fees are anathema to home builders, who argue that impact fees stifle growth and whose lobbying group moves quickly to stop any such bill from passage. But new-home finance packages can amortize impact fees over the duration of the mortgage loan, making it workable for new-home buyers. Furthermore, Stroud Township passed a de facto impact fee a while back and growth continues apace in that township. Ditto in California and Florida, both of which allow impact fees. They don't stop growth. They just help communities pay for it.

And how communities, particularly school districts, need impact fees' revenues. Consider East Stroudsburg Area School District, whose updated active and projected housing unit starts total 15,825, more than 6,300 of those in rural Lehman Township alone. With this scenario playing itself out to varying degrees around the Poconos, local legislators are on the right track in supporting impact fees.

Areas that are growing as fast as Monroe and Pike counties need impact fees if they are even to attempt to keep up with a veritable explosion of residential development.

Without impact fees, property taxes already on a steady upward spiral will reach ever more punishing levels.