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Local

Prince William seeks to impose impact fees on planned houses

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Current rank: # **1,139** of 9,939

Prince William County -

A battle is brewing over proposed impact fees that can bring Northern Virginia counties millions of dollars to help accommodate growth.

The Prince William County Board of Supervisors plans to impose the impact fees on 50,000 houses that have been approved for construction but not yet built. The fees would average \$38,000 per each of the 50,000 houses.

The General Assembly approved the fees as part of the major transportation bill passed this spring. The plan could be a boon to Prince William County, board chairman Corey Stewart said.

If zoning for a development had been approved years or decades ago, Stewart said, "A developer can build hundreds of homes today and not have to pay a single impact fee." The new measure would close that loophole, he said.

But homebuilders already battling a tough market question adding these new fees.

"Our industry is in a very serious downturn marketwise. Now is not the time to increase any fees," said Mark Granville-Smith, president of the Prince William County chapter of the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association. "There is only so much a new home can absorb."

Del. Robert Marshall, R-Prince William, criticized the impact fees at a public hearing in Loudoun County last week, saying builders will legally challenge the law, holding it up in litigation. He said the state attorney general has been asked for an opinion on whether the fees are constitutional.

But the rule brings Virginia in line with policies in other states, one expert said.

"In all the states that I'm familiar with that have impact fees laws, you can charge impact fees on any new construction. If that development was approved one year ago, 10 years ago, when you pull the building permit, that triggers the impact fee," said Arthur C. Nelson, a national expert on impact fees and director of Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute.

The fees "make terribly good sense," Nelson said, because they allow governments to accommodate growth without having to raise taxes on the general public.

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