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Local News: Roscoe, Rockton & South Beloit

School leaders push Rockton for impact fees

Proponents say developers and new homeowners would gladly pay for the chance to live or build in the village.

By Sarah Roberts

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

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ROCKTON — Faced with rapidly growing student enrollments that show no sign of ebbing, local education leaders lobbied Rockton trustees Tuesday to consider implementing impact fees.

Approving the fees, a one-time cost on new developers, has been an ongoing conversation.

Pressure from Roscoe

Since neighboring Roscoe adopted impact fees in December 2003, Rockton has felt more pressure to do the same.

As it has in the past, the Hononegah School Board this year asked Rockton and South Beloit to institute the fees.

On Tuesday, Rockton Superintendent Jean Harezlak, whose district was surprised with more than 150 new students last year, reiterated the enrollment surge.

Our growth had just exploded in the last three years, she said. All I've seen are more and more children coming to our school district.

Harezlak said she understands why people are drawn to Rockton's image as a safe, scenic community with successful schools, and she welcomes the students. But it's time, she said, to give schools some relief.

Proponents of impact fees believe developers and new homeowners will gladly pay for the chance to build and live in Rockton.

The jury still out

Village President Dale Adams says the jury is still out on that theory. Adams has said he doesnt necessarily oppose impact fees, but wants to consider alternatives, such as lowering the municipal tax rate to make a potential school bond referendum more palatable to voters. He wants more proof that impact fees dont negatively affect development.

Robert Lauber, superintendent of Kinnikinnick School District in Roscoe since 1980, has seen multiple subdivisions go up, affecting schools without any cost to developers.

Roscoe and Winnebago County have crafted sound impact-fee ordinances, he said. According to Laubers research, if the Rockton and Hononegah districts had impact fees for the past 25 years, they would have generated about \$2.5 million for each district.

Although impact fees wont pay for teacher salaries and new textbooks, they can be used for land purchases, additions and site improvements. And theres no evidence, he said, that they drive away development.

Impact fees will not stop growth ... or bankrupt developers, Lauber said. But they will shift some of the cost of rapid residential development from current residents and taxpayers to the developer, and thats only fair.

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