

Burlington Free Press

burlingtonfreepress.com

A LOCAL CUSTOM

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[return to burlingtonfreepress.com](http://return.to.burlingtonfreepress.com)

Residents to vote again on impact fees

By Mal Boright
Correspondent

December 5, 2005

For the second time in two years, Richmond voters will go to the polls to pass judgment on a revision to the town's impact fees ordinance.

Following a 135-117 defeat of another proposed revision at a special town meeting last December, the Selectboard on Sept. 6 approved a revision to the impact fee structure which has been in place since the early 1990s. A petition calling for a public vote to rescind the changes was submitted to the Town Clerk's Office in October.

Impact fees on new construction are used to recoup costs incurred by the Town as a result of that new construction. The current structure in Richmond sets new housing fees at between \$900 and \$5,300 depending on the lot size and number of bedrooms. Houses of two bedrooms or fewer are exempt.

The revision sets all new housing fees at \$2,828 for schools and an additional \$218.70 for fire services.

When the Selectboard passed the new revisions, Chairwoman Fran Thomas said the changes were based on public comments during and after the defeat of the previous revisions.

"These changes will bring consistency back to the administrative side," Town Administrator Ron Rodjenski Jr. said last week.

He added that it would be difficult to project whether the new ordinance would bring more money in to the town than the current fee structure. "There could be some additional revenues due to the closing of some loopholes," he said.

One change would be the dropping of the two-bedroom exemption. Rodjenski said that under the current fee structure a home builder planning on three bedrooms could change to two and avoid the impact fee. Selectboard member Pete Parent, who voted against the revision in September, said Saturday that he doesn't like any impact fees and would like to do away with the fees.

"You take a family who can barely afford a \$200,000 house and add \$3,000 to it, and that hurts," Parent said.

Other foes of the fees, including the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Northern Vermont, have cited declining school enrollment in Richmond as the reason for their opposition. Thomas has countered that while enrollment might be declining, the bonds used to expand schools in the 1990s remain to be paid off.

Some observers were predicting a low turnout of voters for the ordinance.

"I think 300 to 400 at the most," Bridge Street Hair owner and state Rep. Denise Barnard said while crediting the Selectboard with hard work on the issue.

Marvin Carpenter, owner of the Bridge Street Cafe and a member of the Development Review Board, said he opposes the revision and agreed with Barnard that the turnout would likely be low.

Craig Colburn, owner of Richmond Beverage and a resident of nearby Huntington, said he is neutral on the subject of fees, but did observe that the repetitive matter "is taking on an us-against-them tone in which the original issue becomes secondary."

Impact fee vote INFORMATION MEETING: 7 p.m. today, Richmond Town Center, 203 Bridge St. VOTING: Secret ballot, 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Tuesday, Camels Hump Middle School.

IMPACT FEE: A fee levied on construction to recoup capital costs incurred by the town as a result of that construction.

YES VOTE: Rescinds the September 2005 ordinance and leaves the 1994 ordinance in effect. The 1994 ordinance imposes fees of \$900 to \$5,300 per new home depending on the lot size and number of bedrooms.

NO VOTE: Puts the September 2005 ordinance in place. The new ordinance imposes a flat fee of \$2,828 for schools and \$218.70 for fire services.

ORDINANCE: Available online at www.richmondvt.com/docu

[ments.php](http://www.richmondvt.com/docu/ments.php) and at the Town Center.

Selectboard disputes mailing

RICHMOND -- A mailing to Richmond residents this past weekend urging a vote to defeat a proposed change in the town's impact fee ordinance has several Selectboard members suggesting foul.

The postcard, which was received by voters in Saturday's mail, was headlined, "Stop The Tax Increase." It said it was paid for by Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Northern Vermont.

Sunday, Selectboard Vice Chairman Erik Filkorn denied that the proposed fee revisions constitute a tax increase.

"It is just the opposite," he said. "The impact fees we have are reducing the (property) tax rate by about a penny each year."

Filkorn estimated that the town took in about \$24,000 last year from impact fees, all of which went into school funding.

Selectboard Chairwoman Fran Thomas, said in an e-mail that "this flyer contains a lot of misinformation relative to the updated impact fee ordinance." She urged residents to read the ordinance and a mailer sent last week by the Selectboard and to attend tonight's informational meeting.

John McCabe, whose name and phone number were listed on the postcard and who is office manager at the Homebuilders and Remodelers Association, declined to comment Sunday on the mailing or the impact fee vote.