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Richmond residents to weigh in on impact fees, again

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 By Mal Boright
 Correspondent

RICHMOND -- Following the narrow defeat at the polls in December of a proposed change to impact fees on new housing construction, the Richmond Selectboard plans to hold a public hearing next month on another possible revision.

The new proposal sets school impact fees for a new single family house at a flat rate of \$2,828 with an additional \$218.70 for fire protection. A proposed fee for highways was eliminated by the board.

According to Town Administrator Ron Rodjenski, Jr., the current fees, adopted in the early 1990s and updated in 1994, are based on acreage, number of bedrooms and type of house being constructed. Fees range from \$900 to \$5,000.

A hearing last month on the new proposal inspired vigorous debate.

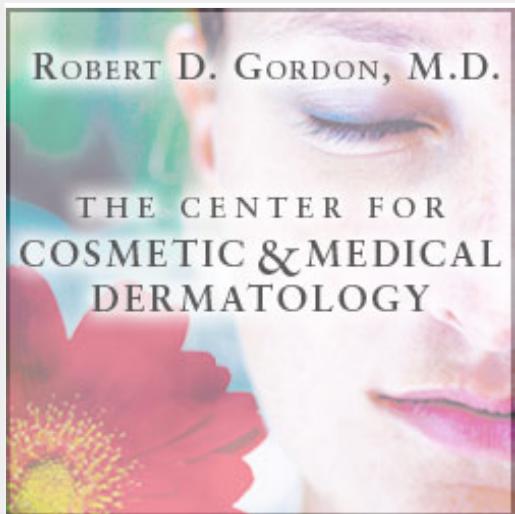
Leading the opposition to changes in the fees is Tayt Brooks, government affairs director for the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Vermont. Citing a recent study by Richard Heaps of Northern Economic Consulting, Inc., Brooks said that because of declining school enrollment, Richmond does not need impact fees on new housing for schools.

"We have always said that we support impact fees that are legitimate," Brooks said last week. "But Richmond is trying to increase impact fees in a time of declining (school) enrollments."

Selectboard Chairwoman Fran Thomas, however, said that's not necessarily the case.

"Yes, there may be fewer kids in school, but we still have to pay down the debt service no matter how many kids are in the schools," she said. "Once the bill is paid and no new capital construction is needed, then the fees can go away."

Thomas said the proposed revision would not necessarily increase education revenues



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over the current fee schedule.

"My guess is (the fees income) will not be a lot different. Most houses being built today have a high number of bedrooms. We are not out looking for more money here," she said.

Heaps was a consultant for Richmond's original impact fee structure in the early 1990s.

"Then we did a study to see if the fees were reasonable and justified," he recalled. "We knew that school expansion was necessary and therefore the fees were justified."

Heaps added that he does not believe the fees are reasonable now.

David Spitz of Essex, who has been consulting with the Selectboard, said he agrees with Heaps' enrollment figures, but argued that "impact fees are a way for a town to strike a balance between new development costs and what monies can be generated by taxes.

"In today's growth, all development has costs."

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