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Article published Apr 25, 2005

## Share the costs of growth

Growing counties can't keep piling most of the cost of new schools, new sewers, new parks, new jails and expanded services onto property taxpayers. The pain needs to be more broadly and fairly distributed.

Pender County Commissioner Steve Holland made that point the other day as he and his colleagues talked about how to repay the \$56 million school bonds they hope voters will approve.

Among his suggestions was to charge "impact fees" to builders. Some counties do, having gotten permission from the General Assembly.

New Hanover charges builders for water and sewer service, but not for schools (with a minor exception), parks or traffic improvements. If the county charged more of the cost of growth to those who benefit most directly from it, New Hanover would have the money to give the school system what it really needs, and to improve other services.

Chatham County is going that route. It already had school impact fees. In the past couple of weeks it almost doubled them for new houses and apartments.

Another approach is to put a tiny county tax on land sales – for example, 1 percent of the price. Dare County got the legislature's permission to do that several years ago. Predictions that it would halt growth in that booming coastal county proved laughably wrong.

Of course, folks in the building and real-estate businesses view impact fees and land-transfer fees as little better than hurricanes, flesh-eating termites and burnt-orange shag carpet. If anything adds a dollar to the price of a house, they're agin' it.

That's understandable, but it's also overreacting. If people want to move to a coastal community with a good climate and lots to do, they're going to move there. Anyway, real-estate prices here are still far lower than in most of the places newcomers are leaving.

Mr. Holland is right. Newcomers, and people who move into new houses, should pay more of the cost of the growth they enjoy.

That not only would be fairer. It also would make it more likely that property owners will be willing to support bond issues for the new schools and other services that growth requires.

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