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## Lawyer presses for impact fees in Madison County

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The struggle over school impact fees in Madison County was revived in a presentation Monday night by a lawyer who is the architect of the fees in some 35 communities around suburban Chicago.

Richard G. Flood gave a detailed talk at Triad High School about the pitfalls and windfalls of the fees, which are assessed against newly built houses to help fund schools. He said one key ingredient for making them work has been coordinated and cohesive leadership - something that has not always been evident in Madison County.

Two cities - Edwardsville and Glen Carbon - already have impact fees, with the money going to the Edwardsville School District. And both the Triad and Highland school districts have asked cities and the county pass them.

But the county board has said it would wait for the cities to go first. And some city officials have said they would support the measure only if other cities and the county went ahead.

Some have questioned the merits of the proposals entirely.

Though Flood backs the fees, he urged officials in the 40-member audience to act as one, regardless of which direction they take.

"It really brings a sense of cohesion and continuity for the cities involved," he said. He cited an example of one municipal association administrator who spent two years trying to bring nine cities in line to pass impact fees in suburban Chicago.

"It was really like herding cats," Flood said. "Everybody really wants their independence and doesn't like being forced to go along with it."

First adopted in the late 1970s, impact fees are now almost the rule instead of the exception in the collar counties surrounding Chicago. Other cities around the state are now considering them, and a hearing is scheduled today on an Illinois Senate bill that would institute a statewide impact fee procedure.

County board member Bob Daiber, D-Marine, who chairs the planning and development committee, wanted to know what to do in unincorporated areas when some communities have passed fees and others haven't. And board member Harry Thureau, R-Glen Carbon, asked how school districts can take the money when not all of the communities in the districts assess the fees.

One frequently cited concern is that impact fees in one community - typically from \$1,000 to \$3,000 per house - will simply drive development to other communities where no fees exist.

Flood said he hasn't seen impact fees hinder development - except when builders have had a choice between nearly identical communities with only one assessing the fees.

Jerry Rombach, executive officer for the Home Builders Association of Greater Southwest Illinois, said such situations - among similar communities prime for building - are found throughout Madison County.

"There's not a huge difference, from a real estate standpoint, between Troy or Highland or St. Jacob or Maryville," Rombach said. "And if one house has an extra fee ... the buyers will exercise their choice and save some money."

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