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< < Back

School board asks to double adequate facilities tax



Students crowd into an outdoor area at Gallatin High School. Crowded scenes are common in Sumner County Schools prompting to the school board to request an increase in the adequate facilities tax to pay for growth. News Examiner photo by Cecil Joyce

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The Sumner County School Board passed a motion, requesting that the county commission double the adequate facilities tax to pay for the school's continuing growth program.

Director of schools Benny Bills suggested the move to the board as a long-term solution for funding growth in the schools. It will be presented to the commission during their

next full meeting on Monday, Nov. 21.

Bills has proposed a \$141.5 million building program to alleviate school overcrowding and plan for future growth.

The adequate facilities tax is a tax placed on new building earmarked to pay for schools in the same zone as the new construction.

"This is something we need to do to keep up with growth," Bills said. "If the commission considers the increase in facility tax, it would generate the necessary revenues to help upgrade our program."

What this means for home buyers is higher costs.

The school board decided to ask to double the tax. This would place the responsibility of paying for new schools on builders and purchasers of new homes and industries in the county.

At this time there is a 70-cent charge per gross square foot on new residential construction and 40-cent charge per gross square foot on industrial construction and there is no adequate tax on commercial construction.

"I understand that the schools need more money for building, but we should lessen the burden and share the blessing," Charles Haynes, owner of Haynes Realty and Auction, said. "A conveyance tax, whenever a title is transferred for property, would create more money instead of just having a tax that produces a one-time source of money."

School board member Randall Stamps agreed with the director's proposal and moved for the board to suggest the tax increase to the commission.

"I propose increasing the residential act to \$1.40 and the industrial to 80 cents," Stamps said. "But I do have mixed emotions about increasing the commercial, I know we need retail development to help with sales tax and doing anything that might discourage commercial development could be counter productive."

Builder Randy Jones does not believe that new home buyers should be penalized with an increase in this tax.

"Instead of a higher impact fee perhaps something broader to spread the burden over everyone in

the county,” Jones said. “The problem with this plan is that it is tied to new development. What happens if the economy slows and home sales dry up?”

Jones believes that more fees will just make it harder for people to buy homes.

“Right now our units are in the \$150,000 range, about 1,500 square feet, which means \$1,050 that a buyer pays up front now,” said Jones. “I can’t imagine the reaction if we double that.”

In order to increase this amount an amendment to the Sumner County Adequate Facilities Private Act would have to be made.

“This would mean the commission would have to send it to the state legislature for approval,” county law director Leah Dennen said. “That could be done by February or March, then it would have to come back for one last vote by the commission.”

School board member Nancy Roth hopes that the commission recognizes the school system’s need for growth and approves the request.

“Jack Anderson is so crowded right now, and all the other schools are getting the same way, so we need to get started,” said Roth.

The county commission will meet Monday, Nov. 21 at 7 p.m. at the Sumner County Administration Building, 355 North Belvedere Drive in Gallatin.

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