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School impact fee prompts hearings in Madison County

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The Madison County Board plans a series of four public hearings to help members decide whether to go along with impact fees on new houses to help pay for new schools.

The board's Planning and Development Committee plans a hearing on July 21 for school officials, a hearing on July 28 for builders and developers, a hearing on Aug. 4 to hear from municipal officials and a final hearing at a date to be determined to hear from other members of the public.

All of the hearings will begin at 4 p.m. in the County Board Room in the Madison County Administration Building at 157 North Main Street in Edwardsville.

Committee Chairman Bob Daiber, D-Marine, said he is taking no stand on the issue and will listen to the public comments with an open mind.

"This is something I feel good about," he said. "We are doing this to let the public have a voice."

Impact fees are more common in northern Illinois, particularly in communities that have experienced fast population growth. In theory, they help offset the cost of new schools needed when residential growth increases school enrollments.

The Edwardsville School District is the only school district in Madison County that has approved a fee, which can run as high at \$3,000. But the fees can be collected in the district's municipalities and unincorporated areas only if the local governments and the county government approve.

The city of Edwardsville and the village of Glen Carbon have approved the Edwardsville School District fee. The village of Worden has rejected the fee, and the Hamel Village Board has said it will go along if the county does. The county decision is pending.

The Maryville-based Home Builders Association of Greater Southwest Illinois strongly opposes impact fees.

Jerry Rombach, the association's executive officer, said impact fees may be

well-intended but unfairly affect only new-home buyers.

He said it cannot be shown that buyers of new homes benefit from new schools to any greater degree than the rest of the community. In fact, he said, nearly two-thirds of buyers of new homes are not newcomers but people who already live and pay taxes in the district.

Rombach noted other ways to ease the burden of building new schools, including a tax on all real estate transfers or a greater reliance on sales taxes or income taxes to help fund public schools.

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