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C is for compromise

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At the Arundel Center in Annapolis, there's a bit of a learning curve still going on. It seems to be most apparent in government relations, and by that we mean the relations between County Executive John R. Leopold and the County Council.

Mr. Leopold, who has been in office little more than a year, has proposed legislation to significantly raise impact fees on residential and commercial development. The package has received a none-too-hearty welcome from council members who recognize the likely political fallout of raising the flat fee of \$4,904 per house (developers are balking) and resent that they weren't consulted.



And yet everyone agrees that the present fee is woefully outdated; there's a difference of opinion on how best to cover the costs of roads, schools and other infrastructure associated with new developments. But Mr. Leopold isn't exactly the compromising kind. And that's a problem for an executive who wants to get things done.

Mr. Leopold's proposal, based on a consultant's review, would establish a progressive fee structure that would range from \$2,636 for a one-bedroom home to \$37,017 for a five-bedroom home. That's the right approach to keep smaller homes affordable for working families in Anne Arundel, but it's a steep incline that would make Arundel's fees potentially the highest in the state.

Also, the county auditor has challenged the basis for the consultant's fees, and Councilman C. Edward Middlebrooks complains that higher impact fees won't do a thing to help make needed repairs to schools in older communities. A half-penny increase in the property transfer tax, he says, would raise \$25 million a year for that purpose and others.

For a county government that labors under a property tax cap, Anne Arundel needs additional revenue to meet its infrastructure needs. An increased impact fee is a likely source, and Mr. Leopold has taken the initiative. But now he has to show political leadership. Compromise is part of governing.

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