

Cecil needs to tap other tax sources

Taxpayers have long lamented the burden of subsidizing their local municipalities and school districts. Officials in Cecil Township have come up with what seems like a reasonable way to tap other resources.

With one large-scale hotel in place and a second on the drawing board, the proposal is to impose a tax on those who stay overnight, similar to what has been done for years in Philadelphia and Allegheny counties.

Of course, there's a caveat. As solicitor John M. Smith informed Cecil supervisors, hotels already are taxed by the state. And unless the commonwealth gives a dispensation, those hoping to reap part of the proceeds apparently are out of luck.

On one hand, local residents benefit from the money the state collects. Some of it returns their direction in the form of grants, school subsidies and other assorted shots in the financial arm.

But what comes from Harrisburg hardly offsets the rising costs of providing local services, especially in a growing municipality such as Cecil. Although the township is able to hold the line on property taxes for 2008, that might not be the case in the future if necessary expenditures outpace revenues.

One model for bringing in more money is the "impact fee" levied first in Manheim Township, Lancaster County, and later in Butler County's Cranberry Township.

The impetus for the fee arose in the mid-1980s as development started to overwhelm the traditionally rural municipalities, and the objective was to have those doing the developing pay for road improvements and other items directly associated with new construction.

These days, however, more taxing bodies seem to be interested in offering abatements to attract development, a process that hardly appeals to the average residential property owner. Just mention the phrase "tax increment financing" to some South Strabane Township residents.

That Cecil Township officials are looking for ways to increase revenue without socking it to Cecil residents is commendable. The hope is that one of their ideas turns out to be feasible.

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