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Hebron charges builders up front

By Monique Lewis
Daily Times Staff Writer

HEBRON -- The Town Commissioners of Hebron plan to step up developer accountability since the latest large-scale annexation on 400 acres of farmland north of town.

John Holston, chairman of the planning commission, said Friday that Harold Scrimgeour will be the first developer who must pay an up-front deposit and contribute funds to the water and sewer systems.

Scrimgeour's planned neighborhood district calls for about 600 homes and several stores. The property was annexed in November 2004.

Holston declined to say the amount of the flat deposit fee until Scrimgeour has been notified. The deposit would compensate outside consultant and attorney fees, he said.

Scrimgeour could not be reached for comment.

Hereafter, all future negotiations will be subject to the fee and payment for water and sewer systems in a developer's rights and responsibilities agreement, Holston said. The negotiation must be approved by both the planning and town commissioners.

Hebron is one of many area governments that have hit developers with a reality check in the past year: If developers want to do business in town, they're going to start paying their share.

Ocean City implemented impact fees about a year ago, Guy Ayres, town solicitor, said Friday. The impact fee is based on the number of units and the fund is dedicated to water, sewer and maintaining adequate police protection, he said.

"You can pay one-half at the time of receiving the building permit and the balance at the time of the occupancy permit," he said.

Also, the town would never turn down a payment paid in full before a building permit is issued, he said.

Salisbury has similar game rules.

The capacity fees were enacted almost a year ago when the Salisbury City Council put its foot down and said it could no longer afford to reimburse developers for up-front costs shelled out to extend water and sewer mains. Developers in Salisbury must also pay capacity fees up front before they receive building permits, said Jack Lenox, director of the Salisbury-Wicomico Planning and Zoning Department.

"If there is a development in the city that requires extension of water and sewer, developers have to pay the entire amount," he said.

All stormwater and traffic studies are on the developer's shoulders as well.

"They should be paying their fair share to address their impact on public facilities," Lenox said.

The Salisbury council plans to add impact fees to the list as well and has hired the consulting firm TishlerBise to investigate which impact fees are feasible for the city.

Salisbury is not the last government to choose that route; even the Wicomico County Council recently decided to began charging such fees.

The legislation would tack on \$5,231 to the cost of new homes and \$1,524 to the price of newly built apartment, town house and condominium units.

After years of disputes, the council finally scheduled a public hearing for impact fees on April 4.

Fruitland City Manager Rick Pollitt said in his town, developers are contributing.

"We require the developer to pay for everything, laying the sewer lines, paving the streets, streetlights, and a water and sewer impact fee," he said. "The impact fees are fairly new for about three years now."

Further fees range from unit charges to plat submissions, which could cost thousands of dollars before the developer breaks ground, he said.

If the county implements impact fees, Pollitt said the local fees would increase.

"We'll find out in the next month or so as we work on the budget for next year."

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