

Georgetown county adds controversial impact fee

By Graeme Moore

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If you plan on building a new home or business in Georgetown County, get ready to pay more.

Georgetown County Council passed a law Tuesday night that will tack on thousands of extra dollars to your cost.

The new fees will fund, in part, about \$330 million of planned capital improvement projects including law enforcement services, parks and recreation, libraries and roads.

Council members say the county is growing and people responsible for the growth (i.e. those building new homes) need to foot part of the bill. And that's where the idea of adding a new impact fee came in.

Anyone with a household income above an estimated \$40,000 who applies to build a new home or put a mobile home somewhere will pay about a \$6,000 impact fee.

For development, the cost could be as high as around \$6,000 per 1,000 square feet of building.

Many developers say they don't necessarily oppose impact fees, but the timing couldn't be worse. With a bad economy, and new home construction nearly halted, this -- they say -- will have a perilous impact.

"The well is dry now, and there's no building going on. The economic impact on the county is yet to be seen. In other words, this vote ... will really just put the nail in the coffin for the real estate business and the building business," said Georgetown County realtor Richard Weston.

And when the council voted yes on the measure Tuesday night, those gathered to oppose -- mostly builders and realtors -- stormed out of the meeting. Many of them bidding farewell to their council members, warning this will be their last term in office.

Every council member except Ron Charlton supported the measure.

Those in support said if they delayed the fees until the economy got better, once they revisited the idea the costs would be even higher. That's an argument that offered little consolation to many in real estate who say if people think business is bad now, just wait to see the impact of these impact fees.

The county is slated to begin collecting the new fees on June 1, 2009.