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Granville panel votes for impact fee

By Shaun Lockhart, The Herald-Sun
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OXFORD -- Granville County inched closer to finding some revenue to offset the rising cost of development by voting unanimously Monday night to direct its attorney to prepare an impact fee ordinance.

Before the vote, Commissioner Ronald Alligood said that the county should throw its support behind Durham County's bid for an impact fee.

"I'm tired of toe dancing," said Alligood of the ongoing debate. "I want something done."

Durham County has faced significant legal opposition to its impact fee ordinance. A judge's January decision to declare the fees invalid is currently in the appeals process.

County Attorney Jim Wrenn had suggested that a public facilities fee would be a better alternative and would place a temporary stop on development until adequate public facilities are available in the area.

Developers who want to build could make a voluntary donation that would be equivalent of the government services provided, Wrenn said.

A detailed study would need to be completed to show that the county lacked the public facilities, such as schools, to accommodate the development.

He said that unlike impact fees, an adequate public facilities fee would be more likely to survive a court challenge.

"Adequate public facilities fees have withstood a court challenge," Wrenn said. "You have to support that with detailed facts and statistics."

But an impact fee would be a direct fee assessed to developers in the county.

The discussion on the fees came after the commissioners voted unanimously to table a special use permit

that would have cleared the way for a developer to build 128 single-family homes and 36 townhouses on 53 acres near Creedmoor.

Alligood asked to delay action on the plan to build the homes on both sides of W.B. Clark Road and Joe Peed Road, because the plan didn't comply with zoning regulations and was different than the plan approved by the county planning commission.

Alligood said that some lots on the plan didn't comply with an 8,000-square-foot minimum lot size requirements. He also said the plan didn't show recreation areas, which was a condition that the planning commission had recommended.

Wrenn said that the county commissioners would reconsider a revised site plan at their May 2 meeting.

Brian Ketchem, an engineer working for developer Bill Wynn on the Applewood subdivision, said that the recreation area had been designated but that the plan hadn't been changed yet.

Several residents, who railed against the project during the meeting, expressed concern later that the commissioners' vote simply delayed the plan's approval.

Greg Bates, who lives near the proposed development, told the commissioners that he felt someone should be able to develop their property as they wanted but added that the project as proposed was too dense.

Others said the low prices of the planned homes -- between \$100,000 and \$140,000 -- would lower their property values.

Commissioner Dave Currin said later that developments like Applewood were a perfect example of what the county was faced with.

The Granville County School District is in a period of extensive building and renovation to keep pace with a rising student population. South Granville High School, with 1,248 students, has 12 mobile units. Officials project the school will have 1,360 students next year.

One resident who opposed the subdivision said the principal at Southern has asked that students not come to school until their classes begin, meaning that his son -- who was 18 years old -- doesn't start his day until 10 a.m.

"We just can't keep approving these subdivisions without some way to pay the bills and recoup the money," Currin said.

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