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Granville passes impact fee proposal

By Shaun Lockhart : The Herald-Sun
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OXFORD -- Among the reasons George Leshar didn't want an impact fee ordinance in Granville County is the fact that he believes they are illegal.

The Granville County Commissioners approved the ordinance Monday night despite the objections of Leshar and other builders.

The ordinance would go into effect for all buildings built after Aug. 1.

Commissioner Hubert Gooch had moved to delay a vote on the ordinance until later this month but his motion failed for lack of a second.

"These fees, if enacted, would be vigorously challenged," said Leshar before the commissioners' unanimous vote.

At a public hearing Monday, Leshar, president of the Vance Granville Homebuilders Association, noted a similar ordinance was implemented in Durham County but was later deemed invalid. The ruling is currently being appealed.

The Granville commissioners had decided more than two months ago to pursue impact fees as a way to offset rising student population and the costs associated with it.

According to the ordinance, a single-family detached home, including manufactured homes, will be assessed a \$2,000 fee.

All other new residential construction, including multifamily dwelling units, will be assessed \$1,250 per dwelling unit.

County Manager Dudley Watts said the county couldn't continue to cover all of the school district's expenses without raising property taxes.

He said teacher supplements, the money the local governments adds to the state's base pay, would continue to rise along with teacher's salaries. "Without some help you are almost guaranteeing yourself that you will raise property taxes each year," Watts said.

The county has already pledged to take out a \$35 million bond to build new schools and renovate existing buildings.

Watts said the money raised through such a fee would be set aside in a special account

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and would go toward improvements to county schools.

Commissioner James Lumpkins said he thinks the board has done everything it can possibly do.

"We have sold all the bonds that we can sell," he said. "So what do we do? Where do we go?"

Lumpkins said he believes, with all the facts presented, that impact fees may not be as bad as people think. He said he didn't want to raise taxes because he knew many people who live on fixed incomes.

"[The builders] hold the key to the success of Granville County," he said. "Do you want to help us with this or not."

Lisa Womack, a realtor, said she moved to Granville County 10 years ago and wouldn't have been able to buy her home if impact fees had been in place.

Womack said the fee would price working people, such as nurses and teachers, out of the county.

Judy Strothar, 68, a county resident, said she supports impact fees and didn't want her property taxes increasing.

"My taxes are going up," Strothar said. "I don't have the solution but there is one thing I do know. I think people who receive the services should pay for the services."

Nathan Garren, a Creedmoor attorney, said new construction has a positive ripple effect on the local economy. He said commercial development follows residential development.

"Just look around," said Garren, noting the drug stores and supermarkets in the area.

In other business, the county commissioners approved \$150,000 in incentives for Dill Air Controls. The county is providing a \$150,000 match for a state economic incentive program. Dill, which is moving from Roxboro to the former Lenox China property, is expected to employ 150 people at the plant. The company plans to sign a 5-year-lease with an option for five more.

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