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Mayor: Impact fees unfair

BY TIM DONNELLY, *The Island Packet*
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The mayor of Hilton Head says the town is being asked to pay more than its fair share for the impact of development off-island.

Web Extras

AUDIO: Hilton Head mayor Tom Peeples discusses the Hilton Head Island Airport during his annual State of the Town speech Wednesday.

AUDIO: Peeples discusses impact fees.

So, the town could adopt impact fees that are significantly lower than what Beaufort County has requested, Mayor Tom Peeples said Wednesday.

"I'm sick and tired of subsidizing Beaufort County," Peeples said during his annual State of the Town speech sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Hilton Head Island. "I need to be convinced that when someone's paying an impact fee, it has to do with the impact they

actually brought to the table, not something somebody else brought."

Town staff disagrees with the county's method for determining the proposed impact fees, which are charged to developers to help pay for libraries, roads and parks. The town is asking for the data used to reach those numbers, Peeples said.

"If they can show us the technical data and how they got to these numbers that they have, then we'll accept them and move on," Peeples said. "If they can't, and we don't agree with how they got there, then we're not."



Photo: Hilton Head Island Mayor Tom Peeples, about half of the town speech Wednesday morning at a meeting of the League of Women Voters.

Jay Karr/The Island Packet

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Town Council already

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Meanwhile, the town is moving ahead with its own plan for increasing the impact fees, Peeples said. That plan calls for an increase from \$268 to about \$800 per home for road impact, about half of the \$1,540 charge the county is seeking, according to a Jan. 5 memo Peeples sent to County Council Chairman Weston Newton.

Peeples said the town is concerned about being forced to pay for improvements on the mainland that will have no benefit to Hilton Head, such as small connector roads for new developments in Bluffton. The Bluffton Town Council already has signed on to the county's impact fees.

Hilton Head's potential defection from the countywide fees has concerned county officials, who included the fees as a key piece of the Southern Beaufort County Regional Plan adopted last year as a manifesto for controlling growth.

At Monday's County Council meeting, Councilman Jerry Stewart said the longer the issue drags on, the more money the county loses by collecting impact fees under the old rates. But Newton said negotiations with the town are ongoing and have been cordial.

Hilton Head was one of the first municipalities in South Carolina to enact impact fees.

AIRPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

Peeples used the rest of his sixth annual address to promote several of Town Council's goals for the upcoming year, including creating a plan to stop any expansion of the county-owned Hilton Head Island Airport and loosening the town's stringent environmental rules.

The town and county are setting out this year to gather information on what would happen if the airport lost commercial service, including what financial obligations would need to be paid off and what the site could be used for after losing air service.

Peeples suggested the terminal could be turned into a long-proposed town law-enforcement center, where the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office staff and municipal court could be relocated.

"We need to know what the facts are before we can make an absolute commitment," he said.

He also touched on the town's plans to revise its environmental rules, which Peeples and other town officials say have gotten out of hand.

"I think they're over restrictive," he said. "They have gotten beyond the point of anything that Charles Fraser ever dreamed of."

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