

Tribune

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Keep impact fee plan out of state budget

Tribune Editorial

The Valley's homebuilders might have a great argument for a bit of fiscally responsible economic stimulus — suspend those hefty impact fees that cities and counties charge, which can increase the price of a house by up to \$20,000.

Give people a chance to buy a more affordable new house or business. Put more people to work. Get one of Arizona's key industries moving again.

But if lawmakers succeed in adopting this temporary suspension of impact fees as part of the state budget, they will have abused the legislative process and bypassed a proper vetting of the competing interests involved.

As Capitol Media Services reported last week, a three-year suspension of impact fees was included in the package of budget bills adopted by Republicans who control the Legislature. Local impact fees are a matter of state policy, but the issue is not immediately relevant to the state budget. Local governments assess the fees and spend the money on local infrastructure projects. Raising or lowering impact fees has no direct tie to state spending and taxation.

The state Supreme Court has gently chastised the Legislature in the past for adopting nonpending policy decisions through budget bills. The constitutional questions can be technical, but the concern boils down to the fact that Arizona founders believed the Legislature should weigh proposed policies separately on their own merits, instead of lumping together unrelated matters in the same bill.

When that happens, some lawmakers might be forced to vote for one policy they believe is wrong in order to win passage of another matter they support. Connecting unrelated issues grants extra power to those most effective at manipulating the system and dilutes voices of opposition to bad ideas.

This suspension of impact fees is particularly egregious because while proposals had been discussed at the state Capitol for a couple of months, no legislative bill ever was written. The actual language became public only shortly before lawmakers moved to adopt a budget last week.

The home-building industry and a few sponsoring lawmakers might understand exactly how this suspension should work. But the rest of us have had almost no time to study the details. That's just wrong.



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