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August vote on growth planned

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The actual vote won't happen for two months, but the outcome seemed clear Monday: Lincoln County ultimately will get a new growth-management program.

A public hearing on the proposed adequate public facilities program drew several critics, led by members of the county's homebuilders and Realtors associations. The groups also turned out in large numbers last year to oppose the program, which is intended to prevent development from overwhelming such county services as schools, water and sewer.

But while commissioners voted 3-2 in February 2006 to abandon the program, turnover on the board has resulted in a majority that now supports a growth-management ordinance. That much was clear even to the spokeswoman for the homebuilders association.

"Most likely this commission has made up their minds on this issue regardless of what we have to say tonight," Cheryl Burgess said.

In the program, developers who propose subdivisions that exceed the capacity of schools, water or sewer could change their plans -- reduce units, find another site or wait -- or submit a plan to raise the level of service. That could mean donating land for a school, building a school themselves or making some kind of payment.

Burgess said the idea of a mitigation plan hurts local homebuilders and favors larger, national firms that can better afford to give up land or pay a fee to get permission to build.

"That tells us that he with the deepest pockets will win," she said, adding later, "Any mitigation is an illegally assessed impact fee no matter how voluntary you make it sound."

Opponents say the cost of mitigation will be passed onto homebuyers, driving up housing prices. But Denver resident Jeff Faucette said he researched similar programs in other states, and that they didn't stifle growth.

"We're not in trouble right now" with development exceeding levels of service, Faucette said, "but let's do it before we get into trouble."

The county's planning board will vote on the adequate public facilities program July 9. Commissioners will vote Aug. 20.