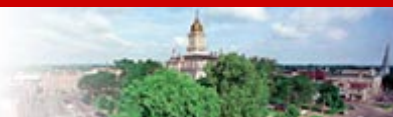




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Local News

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Don't expect help from impact fees

By Chad Klimack
Advocate Reporter

PATASKALA -- Although Southwest Licking Local Schools anticipates a \$2 million-plus deficit at the end of the next fiscal year, a local township trustee recently told the school board it should expect no help from impact fees.

Harrison Township Doug Smith spoke at a meeting Thursday. Smith approached the school board after parent Scott Zook suggested at a Jan. 20 meeting that the school board make developers pay fees -- commonly referred to as impact fees -- before building new homes in the area.

When school board members told Zook they did not have the power to implement impact fees, Zook suggested they approach area townships about implementing them.

Despite Zook's suggestion, Harrison Township cannot institute impact fees, Smith said. Cities can implement them, but townships can not, at least if they have not adopted a limited home rule form of government. Harrison Township is not governed under limited home rule -- voters would have to approve such a move -- and Smith said it is unlikely to happen anytime soon.

"I don't like the notion of trying to break something to fix it," Smith said.

Smith added Harrison Township's current form of government has suited it well since 1816.

Like Harrison Township, nearby Etna Township is not governed under limited home rule.

If Etna Township was, it would have to bear the burden of increased service costs, Smith said. Townships that adopt limited home rule governments have an obligation to appoint a law director and provide a police department, among other costly measures.

Zook was not the first resident to approach school officials about Southwest Licking using impact fees to help the district offset its deficit, and Superintendent Forest Yocum said Zook likely will not be the last resident to try.

"There are certainly conditions you have to have to enact impact fees, and not every township can do it; it's hard to explain to people," Yocum said. "People hear one or two townships do it, and they think every township should."

Yocum added that even if area townships implemented impact fees, they would not solve the district's funding woes. Money from impact fees only can not be used for operating expenses.

"That money only can be used for permanent improvements, capital expenditures -- things like that," Yocum said.

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