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Do school-impact fees on West Hawaii property owners make sense?

YES

For several decades, public policy has been that taxpayers shouldn't bear the entire brunt of building new schools in growth areas, but this policy was implemented project-by-project because there was no state law obligating developers to pay.

A group of developers, educators, and state and county officials spent two years developing an equitable and rational method for requiring some of the costs of future schools be paid by those who would use them.

The 2007 Legislature carried out the recommendations of that working group. Act 245 set out the process for the Department of Education to determine where fees should be collected and spent, and established formulas to calculate the amount of land and fees required. Impact fees apply to individual vacant lots as well as multilot developments.

The law requires a contribution of land for a school and 10 percent of the cost of school construction, based on the number of units planned in a new project. State taxpayers would pay the other 90 percent of the new-school construction costs.

The DOE started by proposing a school-impact-fee district in the area with the largest number of proposed homes and the smallest number of existing schools to accommodate growth. That area was West Hawaii. Now that the first district is established, the DOE will continue with the next-largest area and apply lessons learned in the West Hawaii process.

The West Hawaii district was first proposed in the fall of 2008, but its adoption was postponed several times for additional hearings and analysis at the request of developers and landowners. Implementation began July 1. Individual lots in developments where the developer has already satisfied an earlier school-impact obligation will not be subject to a second impact fee.

NO

The state Department of Education's plan to impose school-impact fees on property owners in West Hawaii is the wrong plan being imposed in the wrong way at the wrong time.

This plan to offset the cost of new schools is being imposed during the worst fiscal crisis since the Great Depression and will further depress West Hawaii's construction industry when many construction workers are already out of work.

A "fair-share" formula already requires large developers to contribute cash or land to support schools when they obtain rezoning from the County or reclassifications from the state.

However, the DOE failed to inform the public that about \$3,300 in new fees will be imposed on any family that wants to build a home on an undeveloped lot from Waimea to



Randy Moore,
Assistant superintendent,
state Department of Education



Kealakekua. The DOE never even extended a courtesy call or letter to inform any county official of its plans.

**Billy Kenoi,
Mayor, Hawaii County**

The DOE selected West Hawaii to test this scheme, citing high growth projected there over the next 25 to 30 years. However, West Hawaii is not even on the DOE's list of top 10 most-needed schools. Six of those top 10 are in Kapolei. The highest-ranking "needed" school in West Hawaii is a middle school for Waikoloa, which is No. 16 on the statewide list.

We support public education and understand the DOE must raise money to build or expand schools, but this proposal flatly discriminates against West Hawaii residents. If this impact fee is truly good for West Hawaii, then it should be imposed in all areas where growth will require new schools.