

CECIL WHIG

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News

Pipkin's reluctance over impact fees frustrates chamber ***Officials would like senator to embrace new revenue source**

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Sen. E.J. Pipkin (R-Upper Shore) told members of the Cecil County Chamber of Commerce on Thursday that he remains opposed to impact fees.

But he agreed to file legislation this session that will pose it as a referendum question on the 2008 ballot in Cecil County so voters can decide.

That's not exactly the answer that most chamber members were hoping for.

"He just doesn't understand the importance of this," said county director of economic development Vernon Thompson.

Pipkin sees impact fees as an increase in the cost of housing for all citizens, not just newcomers to the county.

Thompson sees them as a one-time source of revenue to help pay for water and sewer infrastructure in the growth corridor.

"If we don't have an extra source of revenue like an impact fee on new residential construction, taxpayers will have to pick up the whole tab," Thompson said.

"What really gets me," Pipkin said, "is that some of the same people who advocate for impact fees that will add \$10,000 to the cost of a home are the same ones who are demanding more affordable housing."

The senator from the 36th legislative district, which represents the southern half of Cecil County, part of Caroline County and all of Kent and Queen Anne's counties, still believes Cecil County officials can do more to reduce property taxes in the light of steadily growing property tax assessments in recent years.

"It's not what's needed," Pipkin emphasized, but, "let's put it to the voters."

As many as 67 percent of the county chamber's membership in the past has favored the possibility of a new tax or fee imposed on residential construction.

In the 19-page legislative brief the chamber delivered Thursday to Cecil County's representatives in Annapolis, they again encourage legislative action to permit the county to impose an impact fee on new construction.

Robert Hodge, a member of the chamber and of the county's Economic Development Commission, said he does not favor the concept of impact fees, but admitted the devil could be in the details and until one is actually written it would be difficult to say for sure.

“I don’t like the attitude of ‘dead on arrival’ that was expressed last year by some members of the delegation,” Hodge said. “At least a question on the ballot is a step in the right direction.”

Chamber member Joyce Bowsbey asked Sens. Pipkin and Nancy Jacobs (R-Cecil/Harford) to help Cecil County fight newly created lower caps on nitrogen emissions from county waster water treatment plants.

The caps issued by Maryland Department of the Environment last year could stymie growth along Route 40 where officials are trying to place it, keeping it out of the rural areas.

“We also need the toll plaza moved,” Bowsbey said. “We’re not going to give up on this.”

About 53 members of the Cecil County Chamber of Commerce showed up in Annapolis on Thursday to get a tour of the State House, meet with local delegation members and fight out more about the legislative process.

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