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More than \$1.5 million in impact fees collected

January 28, 2011 - By Matt Armstrong, Journal Staff Writer

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CHARLES TOWN - Jefferson County collected \$1,564,678 in impact fees during 2010, according to the Annual Report on Impact Fees presented to the Jefferson County Commission on Thursday.

Mark Schiavone, the county's impact fee coordinator and department of capital planning and management director, presented the report during a weather-delayed County Commission meeting Thursday afternoon. Jefferson County has had impact fees for the past seven years. The one-time fees are paid on new and proposed commercial and residential developments in the county in order to pay for the increase on services the new growth and population brings.

The fees help support four segments of Jefferson County, with residential impact fees going to support fire and emergency medical services agencies, law enforcement agencies, parks and recreation and schools. Commercial impact fees go toward fire and emergency medical services, as well as law enforcement.

The cost of impact fees is recalculated every three years, Schiavone said in a phone interview Thursday, and sometimes the fees are lowered after the recalculation. For example, the portion of impact fees for parks and recreation dropped during the latest recalculation because of lower property values in the county, he said.

More money from impact fees was collected in 2010 than in previous years, as approximately \$1.418 million was collected in 2009, he said.

He also pointed out the benefits of impact fees over other ways of raising money for the services funded by the fees.

"We've built a new elementary school and are expanding three others without having to go to voters to approve a bond. ... The school system should be funded by impact fees and not attaching bonds to property taxes," Schiavone said. "Look in Berkeley County, new school construction is funded in increases in property tax ... You keep paying to expand the school system for all your life and here newcomers pay to expand the school system."

County Commissioner Walt Pellish said that while he thinks impact fees are necessary, they should be reviewed more frequently than in the past.

"I'm glad to see that we're looking at them now, and we have some serious considerations to come to some conclusions on," Pellish said. "I very much like the approach that they're trying to break out further the definition of different residential requirements."

While she believes impact fees can be harmful to growth in the county, Commission President Patsy Noland thinks the money the fees provide to necessary functions in the county can offset some of the harm caused.

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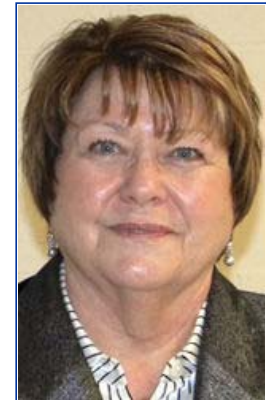
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"It's absolutely beneficial to the school system. ... We've all learned to depend on it (impact fee money) because it takes some of the burden off the County Commission to be able to provide for law enforcement. ... I think we're going to have to make a decision whether we want to lower it, whether we want to maintain what we've done in the past and go from there."

Schiavone's report on the impact fees outlined several proposed changes to the ways the fees are assessed.

"Given the economic times ... this is not the time to go raising impact fees," Pellish said. "I want to seriously have us look at somehow setting aside impact fees as they apply to new businesses being attracted into the area, at least give that a shot. Whether we can do it or not remains to be seen, but we've got to study that."

- Staff writer Matt Armstrong can be reached at 304-725-6581, or marmstrong@journal-news.net

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