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EDITORIAL

SB 1036 not a fix-all, but should be passed

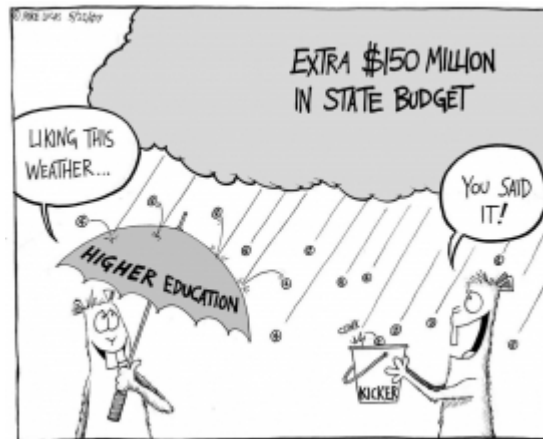
The Times, May 24, 2007

Fees on new development would provide some help to K-12 public schools dealing with rapid population growth or aging school buildings, but they are far from a complete solution.

Oregon legislators and ardent supporters of K-12 public education must be careful that they don't portray Senate Bill 1036, which had its first public hearing Wednesday in the House Revenue Committee, as a panacea for what ails schools.

For years, school supporters have pushed the Oregon Legislature to allow school districts to collect fees on new homes – much the same way as cities, counties and special service districts collect system development charges on new development to help pay for new roads, water and sewer system infrastructure and new parks.

But for just as long, homebuilder associations in Oregon have opposed



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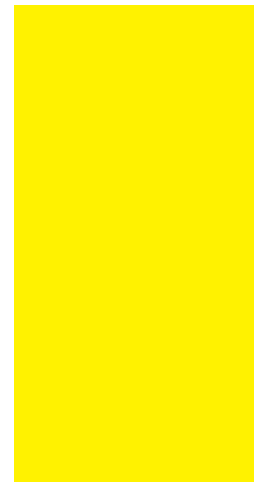
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the idea. Now, homebuilders are saying they will agree to a reduced fee on new homes as long as new commercial and industrial development is charged a school impact fee as well.

Legislation presents dangers

That compromise is Senate Bill 1036, which would give Oregon school districts the discretion to impose fees for every square foot of new or expanded housing, commercial space and industrial development.

All told, supporters say the legislation could generate as much as \$60 million annually throughout all of Oregon. In Beaverton, Tigard-Tualatin, Hillsboro and Sherwood, the school districts could receive anywhere from \$700,000 to \$2 million annually. In Portland Public Schools, a district burdened by many aged and decaying schools, the legislation could generate more than \$4 million a year. That also is the total estimated to come the way of the North Clackamas School District, the region's ground zero of rapid population and enrollment growth.

Such assistance for schools can neither be dismissed as inconsequential nor overemphasized as a fix for what ails educational finance. It is neither. But it is a very small help in paying for new elementary schools that cost \$13 million to \$20 million, a new high school that could cost as much as \$60 million or land for a school that could cost as much as \$9.5 million.

"In general, it's a very small amount of money directed at a big problem that people will think is solved, and it's not," said Tigard-Tualatin School District Superintendent Rob Saxton.

We share Saxton's concern about the size of the problem facing local districts. In 2002, Tigard-Tualatin voters approved an \$86 million bond measure to build new school and repair and add onto older schools. Last fall, Beaverton schools passed a \$195 million bond and Sherwood schools a \$98 million bond to keep up with growth and fix aging schools.

And we share his fear that voters may think that the problem of capital funding for schools has been solved and that school districts no longer would need local property tax bond measures. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Another pitfall associated with Senate Bill 1036 is that it would prohibit cities and counties for 10 years from enacting their own local excise tax. Such a pre-emption is unwise policy because it restricts local governments from developing their own relevant, local funding solutions for essential tasks such as planning and paying for growth, transportation projects or sewer and water systems.

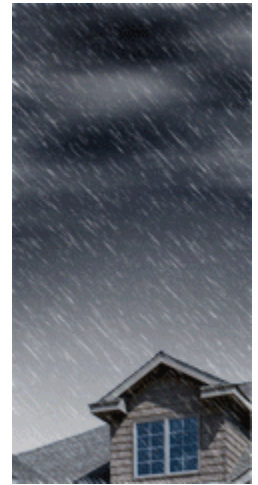
Amend bill and pass it

Over the next few weeks, we urge the Oregon House to improve SB 1036 by dropping the pre-emption for local cities and counties. We also think that hospitals should not be charged the new fee.

We appreciate that Beaverton Sen. Ryan Deckert, who proposed Senate Bill 1036, understands the legislation's limitations.

"(The bill) won't solve the bond problem but makes it much, much smaller," Deckert said. But he adds that it's time for the Legislature to act. "We've been at this well before I ever got here. It's about making growth pay its way in school construction."

We support Senate Bill 1036 and encourage the House Revenue



committee to make some fine-tuned adjustments in the legislation. And we urge legislators, school supporters and homebuilder lobbyists to not imagine this proposal as the final solution.

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