

## Legislation would assess impact fees

### Plan: If Earle homes open up to civilians, Navy, developer pay

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FREEHOLD BUREAU

COLTS NECK — Legislation drafted by Assemblyman Michael J. Panter, D-Monmouth, would have impact fees assessed on 300 homes at Naval Weapons Station Earle, should they become available to non-military families, to help pay the \$30 million tab for a school that might be needed to educate children from those homes.

"The intent of this legislation is to put the Navy and the developer on notice," Panter said in a telephone interview. "If they open the homes up to civilian housing there will be a hefty price tag that goes along with it."

The fees would be paid by the Navy, the developer of the homes or both, under the proposal.

The bill which Panter plans to introduce is based on a recent study that showed a possible 20.7 percent increase in the township's school tax rate should the homes become privatized. Panter said the study was based on the township's 2006 property tax bill and that it did not include the costs associated with building a school. The study showed that each household could see at least an \$1,800 increase in their yearly school tax bill.

"This legislation is the first of two steps aimed at protecting the taxpayers of Colts Neck," Panter said in a written statement Monday. "The educational costs would bankrupt Colts Neck taxpayers."

In 1988, the Navy contracted a private developer to build the 300 two- and three-bedroom homes. The first phase of that contract, which states that the homes were to be occupied by military personnel only, will end in 2010, creating the possibility that non-military families could lease the homes. The housing is currently about 5 percent occupied and the Navy stands to save up to \$5 million annually by opening it to civilians.

The future of that housing deal has been a source of concern for Colts Neck and neighboring Tinton Falls; each fear a large influx of pupils into their respective school districts as a result of allowing civilians to move into the homes.

Since 1988, Tinton Falls has educated the children of military personnel assigned to the weapons station. This year the two towns argued about who should have the responsibility to educate the children of non-Navy personnel.

Tinton Falls agreed to educate the children of all military personnel, and under a bill Panter introduced before the Legislature adjourned for summer would be exempt from educating civilian children living on the base.

The Assembly passed the bill 50-1 with 29 abstentions. However, an identical bill in the state Senate, sponsored by Sen. Ellen Karcher, D-Monmouth, was not voted on before the summer recess.

Last month, the Department of Defense inspector general, at the request of U.S. Rep. Christopher H. Smith, R-N.J., agreed to investigate the deal between the naval station and the private developer.

Panter's draft legislation would allow Colts Neck to assess impact fees on the 300 homes. Much of the weapons station is located here but the township is not entitled to collect property taxes from the homes because the land is owned by the military.

"The impact fees would cover the full cost of any new school construction and would be tied to the square footage (of the school)," Panter said.

A dollar amount per square foot for each classroom would determine impact fee amount, Panter said. On average, a new home is anticipated to generate 1.5 school children, which would amount to at least 500 additional pupils in the Colts Neck and possibly Freehold Regional school districts.

"If the state would have the authority to have a fee imposed that would require this housing to pay for itself that would be a positive step in the right direction," said John O. Bennett III, Colts Neck's attorney. "But (the township) still feels that civilians should not reside on the military post. The situation is about more than just money but I do applaud (Panter's) efforts to make it pay for itself."

Panter said he is drafting a companion bill that would address the annual costs of educating the students. A home at the station could be assessed as much as \$20,000 per year; the current cost to educate a pupil here is \$12,500 per year.

"My real hope is that they (Navy and developer) will look at this and say . . . it might be cost prohibitive," Panter said.

A weapons station public information officer could not be reached for comment.

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