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\$2,500 school impact fee OK'd

Houses already under construction exempted

By Diane Knich
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SUMMERVILLE — New home builders in the rapidly growing suburban area around town now must pay an extra \$2,500 per house to help cover the cost of building new schools.

The Dorchester District 2 school board on Monday unanimously approved a resolution to levy the school impact fee.

The fee must be paid before a new owner can occupy a house. Builders often pass on the fees to buyers, so the move could make new homes more expensive.

The resolution applies to all new homes built in the school district except low-income and retiree housing with specific deed restrictions.

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Various individuals and organizations had asked the board at a public meeting and through letters to exempt certain groups from having to pay the fee. They include people purchasing mobile homes, which are often financed similarly to automobiles, and builders with homes already under construction.

The board approved the exemption for homes already under construction. Any dwelling with a building permit issued before the resolution was passed is exempt from the fee. Charlton deSaussure, an attorney for the district, said mobile homes are not exempt, except for those replacing another mobile home on a plot of land.

Homes built to replace those damaged by fire or other natural disasters also are exempt.

Ryan Castle, government affairs director for the Charleston Trident Association of Realtors, was the only person to speak at Monday's public comment session. "This is not the best way to fund school construction at all," he said. He told board members they needed to come up with a comprehensive plan to pay for new schools because school impact fees won't put a very big dent in the district's need for new facilities.

A bill sponsored by state Sen. Mike Rose, R-Summerville, cleared the Legislature in February giving District 2 the go-ahead to charge the school impact fee on new homes. The Legislature had banned the practice about a decade ago, largely because of opposition from lobbyists for homebuilders. But Rose's bill passed because it applied only to the school district, not the entire county, and because it was considered local, not statewide, legislation.

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