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Does Benson need impact fees?

The older we get, the more we're convinced that timing is everything. And now seems a bad time to place an impact fee on new housing and commercial construction in Benson.

Amid the credit crunch, builders can't sell the houses they have now. Making houses more expensive won't help should matters improve. As for commercial development, well, stores follow rooftops, so if Benson hopes to lure retailers and tax them with a fee, then it ought to make housing easier to afford, not more expensive.

Benson leaders say they need an impact fee to expand water and sewer capacity. Their budget numbers suggest they already have those dollars. According to numbers compiled by the state treasurer, Benson regularly uses water and sewer profits to pay for other town needs. In fiscal 2007, the town transferred \$107,906 from the water and sewer fund to other uses. In 2006, it transferred \$149,991.

Indeed, in the past five fiscal years, the town has used \$692,688 in water and sewer profits for other town needs. At an impact fee of \$1,000 a house, Benson would need to build almost 700 houses over five years to generate that kind of money.

We suspect builders want to keep building houses in and around Benson, which can expect greater housing demand as growth continues moving down Interstate 40. Benson can help those builders, not with an impact fee, but by using money it already has to make water and sewer more readily available.

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