

Culpeper votes to repeal county's road impact fee

BY DONNIE JOHNSTON

Two years ago Culpeper became the first (and only) county to adopt a countywide transportation impact fee ordinance; a tool the state gave to high-growth localities to help raise money for roads.

Tuesday night Culpeper, deciding that the fee was more a business deterrent than a blessing to highway improvement, became the first county to repeal it.

The Board of Supervisors' 5-2 vote came as a joy to a packed house of big developers, small-businessmen and concerned citizens.

The repeal also came despite the pleas of Supervisor Larry Aylor, who urged the board to give the controversial ordinance more of a chance, and Supervisor Bradley Rosenberger, who championed the impact fee as a tool to help solve the county's road problems.

But aside from these two supervisors and David Rowe, who spoke in favor of keeping the fee during a public hearing, almost everyone else in the building burst into applause when the final show of hands signaled its demise.

"The ordinance was well-intended but its outcome has had unintended consequences," said builder Anthony Clatterbuck.

One of those unintended consequences, according to attorney Butch Davies, was to cause two of his commercial clients who are giving thought to locating in Culpeper to have second thoughts. "One gas station was going to have to pay \$180,000 up front and a bank was going to have to pay \$120,000 to build a new building," Davies said.

The transportation impact fee would charge businesses a set amount per vehicle for traffic they might generate.

Stafford County supervisors recently discussed lowering the transportation impact fee that exists in one district, and implementing a lower figure on residential developments countywide. Commercial development wouldn't be affected.

In Culpeper, developers—and private builders—would also have to pay \$563 upfront before getting a residential building permit.

Davies, who was a member of the Commonwealth Transportation Board when the state legislated the right of high-growth counties to enact the fees, added, "What I didn't understand then was that [the fees] would have a negative impact on economic development and job creation."

Hunter Chapman, who is building two new hotels in Culpeper, said it more bluntly. “The impact tax is a killer,” he told the supervisors.

Paul Bates agreed, saying that big-box businesses could absorb the one-time fee, “but for a small mom-and-pop operation, that hurts.”

Aylor acknowledged that the impact fee would not be an end-all solution to Culpeper’s road woes but that it could help. “It’s not going to solve the problem; it will only soften the blow.”

“This is a tool in the toolbox,” said Rosenberger. “We’ve got to have an avenue to offset road [costs] because VDOT is going to throw those roads in our lap.”

“If it’s such a wonderful deal, then why are we the only county in Virginia to have it?” asked Chairman Bill Chase, adding that Culpeper’s “proffer system works very well.”

New supervisor Alexa Fritz, taking part in her first meeting, made the motion to repeal the ordinance.