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Hearing attendees mostly favor impact fee suspension

Commission to vote to suspend certain fees

December 15, 2011

By Matt Armstrong - Journal Staff Writer (marmstrong@journal-news.net) , journal-news.net

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CHARLES TOWN - At a public hearing held by the Jefferson County Commission Wednesday night, 10 people spoke in support of a request by the Jefferson County Development Authority to suspend commercial impact fees for two to four years, while four people spoke against the suspension of those fees.

JCDA President Mark Dyck asked the County Commission on Dec. 1 to suspend commercial impact fees for the period in order to attract new commercial development to the county.

Impact fees are one-time fees paid on new and proposed commercial and residential developments in the county in order to pay for the increase in services that accompanies new growth and population.

Residential fees help support four segments of Jefferson County, while commercial impact fees are revenue for fire and emergency medical services as well as law enforcement. The commission will vote on the matter at its meeting today.

"We think that the suspension of the impact fees ... is a responsible action by the County Commission, that the growth and development that could potentially accompany that action could far outweigh any short-term loss in what is really minimal revenue at this time," Dyck said during the hearing.

Eric Lewis, a certified public accountant in Jefferson County, spoke in favor of the suspension during the meeting and pointed out that Frederick County - which competes with Jefferson County to attract businesses - recently lowered its version of an impact fee to nothing.

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Businesses pay significantly more in annual taxes than what they pay in one-time impact fees, which would greatly offset any loss in revenue for services funded by commercial impact fees, Lewis said.

Lori Stilley, the former president of the Jefferson County Board of Education, spoke against suspending commercial impact fees during the hearing and said it comes down to a matter of funding.

"The question at hand comes down to who will pay - those creating the burden for the (emergency) services, and commercial services do create a burden for these most important safety fees, or the single mother in Shenandoah Junction, the grandparents in Summit Point or the retired folks in Kearneysville," Stilley said. "Someone will have to pay the impact due to the new commercial development and an increase in demand ... and it should not be the current residents of the county."

The County Commission is scheduled to vote on whether to suspend commercial impact fees at 11:15 a.m.

- Staff writer Matt Armstrong can be reached at 304-725-6581, or marmstrong@journal-news.net

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