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Planners reverse impact-fee vote

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BY DONNIE JOHNSTON

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It was a night of contradiction.

First, the Culpeper County Planning Commission voted 7-1 to recommend that the Board of Supervisors amend the Comprehensive Plan to allow for the implementation of transportation impact fees.

Then, 10 minutes later, the Commission voted 4-3 that they didn't approve of traffic impact fees at this time and recommended that the supervisors put the matter to a public vote and let the citizens decide.

"Traffic impact fees are not appropriate now because of the economy," said Laura Rogers, who cast the only negative vote in the first motion.

Rogers said that the impact fees, which would require anyone building a house to put up another \$431 (the recommended fee), would put yet another burden on the crippled home-building industry.

That money, to be collected in a service area that would include the entire county, would go to three designated road projects--the Western Outer Loop and the Nalle's Mill Road realignment in the county, and the Inner Connector Road in the town.

During a public hearing, Kurt Christensen of Richardsville presented a petition with 50 signatures asking that, "in the spirit of fairness and openness," a citizen referendum be held to decide the matter.

He reminded the Commission that the Board of Supervisors had rejected traffic impact fees in 2008 (by a 4-3 vote) and that "economic conditions are worse now" than they were then.

But Commissioner Frank Toomey, who sat on the traffic impact fee committee, refuted Christensen's assessment of citizen sentiment. "We held five community hearings, and we didn't see any of the opposition that is listed in Mr. Christensen's petition."

Rogers, who was firm in her opposition from the outset, said she felt that the three road projects were worthy but added, "I do not feel the actual impact fee should be in the Comprehensive Plan." She voted her opposition the first time around but then made a second motion that said the commission opposed the impact fees at this time. Jack Frazier, who had voted with the majority on the first motion, seconded the motion, and Lou Price offered an amendment to put the matter to the voters.

Price, Frazier and Walter Burton joined Rogers in the second motion while Toomey, Dewayne Payne and David Lowery voted no.

Chairman Sanford Reaves, who stated that "somebody is going to be taxed [for road improvements]," abstained on the eight-person Commission (Bob Burnett was absent), and the contradictory motion carried.

The matter now goes to the Board of Supervisors, who plan to hold their own public hearing on the matter in December. If approved, Culpeper would be the first county to adopt transportation impact fees since the state approved the idea in 2008. Stafford has the fees, but was granted the right to enact them a number of years ago under specific legislation.

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