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School impact fees could be recalculated

Jefferson panel to consider house size as the basis for the assessment.

By Naomi Smoot / Journal Staff Writer

POSTED: September 19, 2008

CHARLES TOWN - Members of the Jefferson County Commission could soon consider whether school impact fees should be recalculated based on the size of a resident's home.

County Commissioners entered into preliminary talks Thursday with impact fee coordinator Mark Schiavone about the possibility of re-evaluating the process used to calculate school impact fees in the county.

Nationally, Schiavone said there is a trend toward linking the size of a resident's house with the amount of money they are charged for school impact fees. And while there are some unique situations at play in Jefferson County presently, he said the measure is one he would like to examine.

"I still think that's something worth considering," he told commissioners.

Traditionally, the school impact fee has been recalculated every three years in Jefferson County.

This new approach could be one way of tackling the issue this time around, officials said. Still, with the number of building permits issued in the county down, Schiavone said it is not an urgent matter and the commission might be able to hold off on taking action.

If such a measure were approved, he said officials would look at housing size and the number of students generated from each home. A nexus between home size and an increased number of children could result in a change in the way the fees are currently assessed.

Still, some commissioners questioned whether the assumption that larger homes generate more children was realistic. Commissioner Rusty Morgan stated that when the situation is evaluated, officials may find that smaller homes actually contain the most children.

But with the changes in housing styles and sizes that have occurred in the county in recent decades, Schiavone maintained that the issue was one that could be examined.

"Certainly, 18 years ago we didn't have as many big houses," he said.

Still, the housing market has undergone other recent changes as well, noted Commissioner Jim Surkamp,

who stated that more children may now be found in townhouses and other smaller homes than before.

Commissioner Dale Manuel, however, asserted that small homes in the county could be more likely to be used as retirement homes, instead of housing young families with school-age children.

Commissioners agreed to let Schiavone obtain a price quote from a consultant who could help study the issue. No change was authorized at present, though commissioners did express interest in gathering more information on the proposal.

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