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Seabrook needs impact fee ordinance

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Taxes pay for infrastructure improvements, not extortion fees from property owners that want to exercise their right to use their property. Why do towns in NH let their roads get overburdened for years and then jump on a big retail company to pay for the sins of the past? If a new traffic light is needed in front of a store or a couple of turn lanes, that is reasonable, but asking them to build bridges that were needed years before they came around is not ethical. To say you must make these improvements or no permit is straight out highway robbery. If the tax revenue can not support the needs of the town, then the town needs to generate more revenue by increasing taxes or increasing the tax base.

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To the editor:

I have recently been going door to door talking to voters about the prospect of enacting a tax-cutting impact fee ordinance in Seabrook, one of the few towns on the seacoast not having one in place. Currently, at least 75 towns in New Hampshire charge impact fees to developers, garnering usually \$1 to \$3 per square foot of new construction, so that property taxpayers will not be hit with the cost of new public facilities. When new subdivisions and retail stores are built, towns must spend millions adding new vehicles, parks, classrooms, water treatment, fire trucks, roads, traffic safety measures, and other facilities just to keep an even keel with services. The real question is who should pay for this new equipment, residents or developers?

A correctly established fee schedule will get developers to pay most of their fair share of new facilities. To some extent, developers also repay the town for their share of existing excess capacity according to a "buy-in methodology." Property taxpayers should see a slight decline in their property taxes, depending on how much new development comes in and what the final rates are.

Regarding the impact fee ordinance drafted for Seabrook, additional safeguards are built in to aid taxpayers further. To reduce litigation, the ordinance sends appeals through the existing Zoning Board of Adjustment, keeping most of these cases out of court. To keep rates fair, an advisory panel can review the methodology, fee schedule and the impact fee fund itself, further reducing liability. Buildings, gear, computers and vehicles are purchased which are safer, more durable and energy-efficient, reducing long-term operating and maintenance costs. Bonds can be paid off years earlier, reducing what we pay in interest rates.

Finally, Seabrook would have an easier time applying for matching grants, if money is present in the fund for new facilities. With rates known early on, many smaller developers actually prefer predictable impact fees to the exactions currently negotiated with the Planning Board, saving them thousands on legal fees and studies.

Existing businesses and residents are left alone — only new expansions larger than 2,500 square feet (or containing hazardous materials) and new subdivisions are assessed. Should a builder find themselves unable to pay, they are free to set up a 5- or 10-year payment schedule with the town. I believe that Seabrook would be better off over the long run with impact fees than without them, and would encourage everyone in town to review the proposal and investigate the pros and cons of impact fees before we vote on it next March.

Albert "Max" Abramson

Seabrook

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