



## County, schools agree to impact fees

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The Beaufort County School Board on Tuesday unanimously endorsed charging developers \$6,000 for each new home built under county development agreements. Board member said they hoped their united front will convince municipal leaders to follow suit and charge the fee.

"We need the force of the school board behind (the proposal) when we take it to the towns," said board member Jim Bequette, who helped calculate the fee.

The fee is designed to offset to the costs the school system incurs when big neighborhoods are built, but so far, Beaufort County is the only local government that has agreed to charge it. The fee also includes a \$2.50 charge per square foot of commercial space built under county development agreements.

The money could be used to buy land for new schools, cover some construction costs and furnish classrooms.

But several school board and county council members said during a joint meeting Tuesday that the new fee will only be effective if growing municipalities such as Bluffton and Beaufort agree to charge it.

"If this works as we hope it will, the vast majority of the revenue is not going to come from the county development agreements. It's going to come from the municipal agreements," said councilman Paul Sommerville. "That's where the money is."

State law prohibits the collection of school impact fees, but the restrictions do not apply to fees negotiated in development agreements. Those types of agreements are typically made when developers seek a change in zoning. State law allows local governments to negotiate with developers who want to build more homes than current zoning allows.

Beaufort Mayor Bill Rauch and Port Royal Mayor Sam Murray said last week they don't object to establishing the new fee. In July, Bluffton Mayor Hank Johnston said he liked the idea, but wanted to make sure it was a fair fee. He could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Some local homebuilding and Realtor organizations have said they oppose the fees because they ultimately increase housing costs. Developers pass the fees along to homebuyers.

The board voted 10-0 to endorse the fee.

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