



Berkeley officials dispute document

Impact fee info called misleading

By Andy Paras
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MONCKS CORNER — Berkeley County officials say Moncks Corner is distributing false and misleading information about county fees in an attempt to lure property owners into town limits.

Supervisor Dan Davis on Thursday released a document obtained by the county that compares fees in the county with fees in the town.

The document, printed on Moncks Corner letterhead, makes some of the county's fees look worse than they really are, said Bonni Watson, county permitting manager.

Davis said the county doesn't oppose annexation but is concerned about the misinformation. Officials said the most troubling part of the document implies that businesses within the impact fee zone between Moncks Corner and Hanahan can avoid paying impact fees by being annexed into the town.

The county's position is that South Carolina law clearly states businesses still have to pay the impact fee once the fee is assessed, even if they are later annexed.

The town so far has been silent on the matter.

"Lots of people have varying opinions. Lots of lawyers have varying opinions, and I don't have any comment," Moncks Corner Town Administrator Marc Hehn said Thursday when asked about the impact fee.

When asked about the document comparing rates, Hehn said the town is always discussing annexation with property owners and that it didn't have to do with any particular plan. He said no one from the county has contacted him about the allegedly incorrect information, but he is willing to discuss it with them.

Both Hehn and Mayor William Peagler have refused to discuss the town's annexation plans.

County officials said they expect the town to try to annex property that stretches as much as seven miles south of Moncks Corner along the U.S. Highway 52 corridor.

The town would need 75 percent of the property owners who own three-quarters of the assessed value to agree to annexation.

Two of the largest property owners along that stretch are Foxbank Plantation and Carolina Nurseries, both of which have a reason to want to get out from under the impact fees.

Foxbank is facing impact fees on houses and a commercial area set for development, while Carolina Nurseries is in a disagreement with the county over a recent impact fee assessment on a new greenhouse.

J. Guy, president of Carolina Nurseries, said he had never seen the Moncks Corner document but declined to comment about whether the town has approached him about annexation.

When asked if the company would join the town if it could escape the impact fee, he said it will appeal the most recent assessment based on its belief that agricultural businesses should be exempt.

"I don't think we can skirt this one," he said of the assessed fee on the greenhouse. "We'll go through the appeal process and if we lose, we'll pay."

He declined to comment about whether the company would consider joining the town in the future.

A representative with Foxbank Plantation could not be reached for comment.

Davis said the county doesn't oppose any annexation, but it does want everyone to have the proper information about the impact fee, which was approved in 2006 as a way to generate matching funds for road projects.

"We're not going to stand in their way," he said. "We just want the property owners to understand that the impact fees will still be assessed and have to be collected."

Roughly \$2 million a year will go toward matching funds for a new Interstate 26 interchange between the Summerville and Jedburb exits.

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