

Tucson Citizen

HOUSING AND GROWTH

Our Opinion: County needs a regionwide impact fee

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Pima County's plans to raise its transportation impact fee for new homes is overdue - despite the protestations of homebuilders and sellers.

The county should also press ahead with discussions to make the impact fee apply countywide instead of being limited to certain areas.

It has been 12 years since the Pima County Board of Supervisors approved a fee of \$1,550 per new home to help pay for roads that would be needed by new residents.

The fee has been increased several times and now stands at about \$4,600 per home. Chuck Huckelberry, the Pima County administrator, says he will recommend an increase to \$8,800 to be imposed before the middle of 2009.

With the recession driving home building and sales to their lowest levels in decades, builders and real estate agents are rightly concerned about the increase, which would be passed along to buyers.

But if there are new developments, roads must be built to serve those residents. And with the county transportation budget already stretched serving existing developed areas, new residents must "buy" into the infrastructure.

Under state law, transportation impact fees can be imposed in designated areas only, with the money raised in those areas spent there for road improvements.

Huckelberry is recommending a regionwide impact fee - something that would require the cooperation of the incorporated cities in Pima County.

That is worth considering. New residents don't drive solely in their corner of the county. The impacts of growth and additional traffic are felt regionwide. Several states allow regional impact fees, and Arizona should do the same.

Pima County should be able to spend money raised from impact fees anywhere on projects necessitated by growth.

With five cities and towns sprinkled across the unincorporated area of Pima County, roads can and do pass through several jurisdictions. The Regional Transportation Authority was created to bridge those jurisdictional gaps. Having a regionwide impact fee for transportation is a logical next step.

Current impact fees are based on road construction costs from six years ago. There is no question they must be increased so new development helps pay some of the additional costs it creates.