

## Cities around county unhappy with commission action

By DAVE RICHARDSON Chronicle Staff Writer

The recent decision by Gallatin County commissioners to impose transportation impact fees only on residential development, while letting commercial developments off the hook, continues to generate heated opposition.

Officials from each of the county's municipalities met with County Commissioner Bill Murdock at Belgrade City Hall Wednesday and made it crystal clear that they were not happy with the county's decision.

They urged him and other commissioners to either reconsider it or come up with workable ways to lessen its potentially chilling effect on the business climate in cities and towns.

Bozeman officials publicly lambasted the county's decision last week, and continued to raise concerns about it Wednesday.

"One of my goals here today is to find out from the other cities if we're the lone voice in this," said Bozeman City Manager Chris Kukulski.

Residential development creates more infrastructure costs than it brings in in tax revenue, Kukulski said. The opposite is typically true of commercial development, and driving business out of cities will put a greater burden on their taxpayers.

"I think the smaller towns have as much or more to be concerned about with what I paraphrase as an invitation to, 'Do your business out in the county, but build your houses in the cities,'" Kukulski said.

Furthermore, allowing businesses to escape impact fees in the county could harm local economies by driving new commercial development away from urbanized areas, a move that's in blatant contradiction to the county's own growth policy.

"This seems to be an invitation to in exactly the opposite direction," Kukulski said.

Belgrade City Manager Joe Menicucci was blunter.

"Belgrade doesn't have a large commercial district as it is," Menicucci said. "And to take away new opportunities we might have, or any opportunities we might have is not something we can afford to look at."

Kukulski said the plan to treat the entire county as a single area, charging the same residential impact fees in outlying areas around Three Forks and West Yellowstone to build roads used mostly by people in Belgrade and Bozeman, is inherently unfair.

"If I live in West Yellowstone and I'm paying for roads that are 80 miles away, I'm going to be pretty upset," Kukulski said.

Manhattan Mayor Tony Haag also criticized the county's decision to not charge impact fees to

businesses. Manhattan charges its own impact fees for residential and commercial development - a political necessity that cannot be sacrificed.

“Politically, in Manhattan if we don't charge an impact fee, they'll lynch us, because the people who've lived there for 30, 40 years do not in any way, no how, want to pay for any future growth,” Haag said.

Murdock tried to reassure the group, saying that even though impact fees won't directly be charged to business, other funding mechanisms - including business improvement districts, a possible 2-cents-a-gallon county gas tax and increased motor-vehicle registration fees -- will make up the difference.

“We are not looking at this as a silver bullet to solve all our transportation problems,” Murdock said.

Later, the group agreed the meeting had been productive, and expressed hope that greater and more regular communication will lead to real solutions.

“I think we should do this more often, but next time I'm bringing my posse with me,” Murdock, who bore the brunt of the day's criticism, said.

“Well, Bill, when you bring your posse, let us know how many ropes we're going to need,” Menicucci quipped.

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