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Local

Home builders: Show link between impact fees, schools

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BALTIMORE -

The bitter pill of raising fees for home builders might be easier to swallow if [Anne Arundel](#) could guarantee the revenue would benefit the schools where the new housing is being built, officials said.

"We would hope in exchange for the industry to absorb the higher fee that [there] is a more rational methodology in handling school capacity," said [Eliot Powell](#), vice president of the [Home Builders Association of Maryland](#).

The association's view is shared by some County Council members, who want to see the impact fee — money a developer pays the county for its project's effect on roads and schools — linked to school capacity. The county faces a \$1 billion backlog of school construction projects.

[County Executive John R. Leopold](#) and some council members have said the fees will be increased, but some developers said that move would cripple work-force housing and growth in Anne Arundel.

"Raising the fees while the gross numbers of permits are dropping and not paying the impact fee doesn't do the industry or the county any good," Powell said.

But a contracted consultant, [James Nicholaus](#), said the county is shortchanging itself by charging one of the lowest impact fees in the state.

A developer building a new single-family house is charged \$3,810, while that house's impact cost is \$13,187, according to his report.

"The question is who is going to bear the burden — new development or the taxpayers," said [Ann Fligsten](#), leader of community advocate group Growth Action Network.

"As of now, the majority of the burden is going to the existing tax base."

The council recently granted itself the power to determine which neighborhoods are closed to residential growth because of overcrowded schools. Such a move could open development in areas where schools can handle more students but are listed as over capacity because data have not been updated in nearly two years.

The council has set a March 1 deadline to create a new school-capacity chart.

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