

# CECIL WHIG

SERVING CECIL COUNTY SINCE 1841

## News

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### **Project: Impact Fees**

#### **\*The catch: APFO needs fee's money to work**

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The county is working to adopt an adequate public facilities ordinance, but officials claim the lack of an impact fee threatens to warp the policy into a money pit.

"If (the ordinance) is to be considered, a funding source needs to be tied to its approval," County Administrator Al Wein said.

The plan has been touted as an important tool in managing growth, as Cecil housing subdivisions continue to outstrip the improvements made for county services. Residential development is projected to skyrocket with a planned shift of military personnel bringing tens of thousands more workers to Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Meanwhile, the county has struggled to attract high-paying industry, with the blame pinned by officials on meager water and sewer lines underneath its Route 40/Interstate 95 growth corridor.

The feared result: A bedroom community for Baltimore, Philadelphia and Wilmington, Del., in which property taxes are the dominant source of funding for new roads, school additions, and water and sewer lines.

With the ordinance, the approval of new developments would be dependent on the adequacy of public services in the county, such as schools, roads, police coverage and water and sewer infrastructure.

So if schools and roads are impaired because of overcrowding, new developments essentially cannot be approved until more are built.

Cecil County would then slow growth to a more manageable level and the county, ideally, wouldn't be saddled with costly decisions that come with population surges.

The county commissioners recently finished a draft that requires schools and roads to be ready for growth before new developments can be approved.

But questions over how the upgrades would be financed threaten to derail the push for reform. Without another form of funding, the county would be compelled to embark on major construction projects with only tax money to foot the bill.

The authors of an alternative proposal say the county need not foot the bill for costly upgrades necessitated by new development.

A group led by the county's mayors drafted a plan that would force developers to either contribute money for the required improvements or construct the facilities themselves.

Still, many county leaders insist that an impact fee is needed to allow Cecil County to meet a strict timeline that shows no mercy on its ability to pay.

They say if Cecil doesn't make the improvements on time — based on a schedule to be laid out in the county code — it makes itself vulnerable to a slew of lawsuits from developers waiting to build.

“It's like a clock that starts ticking,” said Josh Brown, chairman of the Cecil County Planning Commission. “The developer can sue the county if the improvements aren't done on time.”

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