



## THE EXPRESS-TIMES

### **Lawmakers tout bill to make builders pay**

**Hearing held on home fee plan. Developers say taxes can cover education.**

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**By DOUGLAS B. BRILL**  
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U. MT. BETHEL TWP. | Superintendent John Reinhart, according to state Rep. Steve Samuelson, is the Oprah Winfrey of the Bangor Area School District.

While the day-time talk icon routinely gives her studio audience free gifts, he explained, it is Reinhart's duty to give every kid in the school district a free education.

"The difference is she can use her personal wealth. You have to rely on taxpayers," Samuelson, D-Lehigh/Northampton, told Reinhart as legislators, Bangor Area residents and others discussed how to make home builders pitch in for public education.

While it would create cash flow less than Winfrey's, a bill slowly making its way through the state House of Representatives would create a new revenue stream for school districts. It would let school districts charge developers for each home they build.

As the bill stands, it would let school districts impose a \$5,000 to \$15,000 fee per new home, depending on the number of bedrooms. Educational impact fees, supporters say, would help offset the cost of educating the students that new homes bring to school districts.

Most of those who discussed the bill at a public hearing Thursday said they liked it but thought the fees were too low. The bill's primary sponsor, state Rep. Richard Grucela, D-Northampton, said he would like to change the fee from a flat one to one determined by a formula.

"Housing developments are being built too quickly for the school districts to keep up," Grucela said. "It's time for developers to share the burden they help create."

Reinhart and six others who testified at the hearing said they want the bill to pass.

Mark Mitman, who represents the Pennsylvania Builders Association, was the only one present who didn't want passage. He said new homes can create enough tax revenue to cover the cost of educating the people who live in them.

State Rep. Robert Freeman, chairman of the House local government committee, which held the hearing, declined to set a timetable to pass the bill. But he said legislators could vote on it this fall.

The fees have been proposed at least twice in Pennsylvania since the 1980s but have never gained approval, Grucela said.

Reporter Douglas B. Brill can be reached at 610-759-0508 or by e-mail at [dbrill@express-times.com](mailto:dbrill@express-times.com).