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Making builders pay up

Townships collecting for impact on schools. Officials say \$20K-\$30K fee per home ought to do it.

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By MICHELLE PITTMAN
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U. MT. BETHEL TWP. | Supervisors want developers to pay their share of the cost to educate children who move into the homes they build.

And they've enlisted the help of supervisors across the county and state.

The board unanimously approved a resolution this month that asks the county's Association of Township Supervisors to support charging developers between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per new home to offset costs that fall to local school districts when new students are enrolled.

Under state law, school districts don't have the authority to charge such fees, but townships can collect money to offset sewer, road and other maintenance costs. The township code, however, says nothing about charging costs on behalf of the school district.

If the county association approves the impact-fee idea at their annual conference in October, representatives will present the issue at the annual meeting of the state Association of Township Supervisors, which can then take the issue to the state legislature.

"It's the long way around doing it," township Secretary Maureen Sterner said. "But the board agreed that this is the best way to get this to the state level."

Aaron Hook, manager of Bushkill Township and president of the county's Association of Township Supervisors, said members are aware the issue is pressing, though he hasn't seen the letter drafted by Upper Mount Bethel Township.

"In theory, in concept, I think this is probably something we can pass on to the state level," Hook said. "I haven't seen this come up as a resolution, but it's been discussed through different venues of the state association. It's not an idea limited to this area."

The state association will hold its annual convention in April. Without a special meeting at the county level, members wouldn't hear about school impact fees until 2007.

Upper Mount Bethel Township Supervisor Loren Rabbat said waiting isn't on her agenda. With potential development looming at several sites in the Bangor Area School District, she said this initiative needs to get approval as soon as possible.

"My intention is not just to say I've done something and have it sit around for 11 months," Rabbat said. "We're going to request a special meeting for the county association. We want them to take action in an expedient manner."

Lower Mount Bethel Township resident Don Dal Maso spearheaded the impact fee initiative. He estimates a single new student will cost taxpayers \$27,000 in the first year he or she is enrolled in the district. He has called for all municipalities in the Bangor Area School District to band together to alleviate that cost.

So far, only Upper Mount Bethel has taken action.

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