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Resident wants developers to pay for schools **He says their housing projects create need in Bangor Area district.**

By Fred Walter
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Local officials and residents of the Bangor Area School District should join forces to make developers pay school expansions made necessary by their new housing projects, a resident said at a school board meeting Monday.

The suggestion was made by Donald Dal Maso, a resident of Lower Mount Bethel Township, which is part of the school district, along with Upper Mount Bethel and Washington townships.

He didn't ask for specific action but urged further public debate on the idea. He got a sympathetic response.

Superintendent John Reinhart said he would bring up the subject at a meeting of the Slate Belt Chamber of Commerce's Economic Development Committee to arrange a regional meeting of local officials to discuss the proposal.

Dal Maso said it's time that communities put the burden on developers who he claims profit at the expense of local taxpayers.

"Do any of us accept that countless millions [of dollars] should pour into developers' hands, causing the community to face massive school construction bond issues, which in turn will cause property taxes to double or triple overnight?" he said.

School boards don't have the authority to assess impact fees on developers, but legislation is being written by state Rep. Richard Grucela, D-Northampton, a Lower Mount Bethel Township resident, to require developers to at least assist in the cost of school construction except on projects built only for senior citizens. Dal Maso expressed doubts that such a law would get enough support because of influences from lobbyists for corporate developers.

Dal Maso said Grucela agreed that local townships would be the appropriate governmental bodies to enact the impact assessments on a local level. "The first thing you will hear from some quarters is that 'the townships can't do that,'" he said. "My response is, 'Yes they can, if the community wants it.'"

School Director Olav Sandnes of Upper Mount Bethel Township said the use of impact fees should be encouraged, but it should be clearly determined what powers the townships have to impose such fees.

Dal Maso predicted that developers would appeal such fees in court, but it would be less costly to challenge such appeals on fundamental issues of justice.

"Or would we prefer to submit humbly to debt maintenance on many millions of dollars for school construction? A debt that would endure for many years," he said.

The school district is in the final design stage for a major expansion and upgrade of the Washington Elementary School, a project estimated to cost more than \$15 million. The board approved a \$10 million bond issue two years ago but is considering additional bond revenue to cover costs based on actual construction bids in the spring.

Also Monday, the board delayed action on a revised drug and alcohol policy that will be expanded to include stricter disciplinary action for students possessing or using tobacco products on or off school property.

Fred Walter is a freelance writer.

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