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Fee hike is necessary

By Staff Reports · heraldonline.com FTP

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York County officials didn't decide to raise development fees out of the clear blue. The decision was the result of comparisons with what a number of other nearby counties are charging.

Despite complaints from local developers, we think the fee hike is valid. The new charges will take effect Wednesday.

Local developers, including members of the Home Builders Association of York County, argue that the timing on the increase is terrible. With home sales in a slump, they say, this is no time to hike the cost to builders -- which ultimately will trickle down to buyers.

In actuality, there is no good time to raise such fees, which cover the cost of paperwork associated with construction plans. A fee increase always will have some impact on builders' costs that can be expected to be passed on to buyers.

County officials also note that the increase might help the county better control its growth. In recent years, lack of residential growth has not been a problem for the county. Booming growth, which affects the ability of local governments to provide classroom space, police and fire protection, roads, water and sewer needs has been the real problem.

York County's development fees have been lower than those across the state line in the Charlotte area. That has been an incentive for developers to come south for their projects.

When the county started comparing its development fees with those of other counties, such as Mecklenburg and Gaston in North Carolina and Aiken, Horry and Spartanburg in South Carolina, its rates generally were lower. With the fee increases, the new rates fall about midway between the highest and the lowest of those rates.

Even with the increase, the new fees are not astronomical. Under the new system, each site plan needing a second review by the county will cost \$100 instead of \$50. A third review will cost \$250, and each one after that will be \$1,000.

With current low fees, some developers commonly have submitted plans that aren't complete just to get the projects going, York County planning director Susan Britt said. Some developers have resubmitted paperwork for revisions as many as

13 times, draining staff resources, she said.

We think the fees should largely reflect the cost of doing the paperwork. While contractors complain about having to pay that cost, we see no reason county taxpayers should have to absorb it.

We hope the housing boom eventually returns. But, in today's uncertain economic climate, a few bucks more for development fees might be the least of the developers' worries.

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