

Testimony in Support of Council Bill No. 16-04 to Increase Library and Public School Impact Fees

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The issue before you tonight is really very simple. In fact, it's much simpler than some of you have made this out to be. The County has used a methodology for calculating impact fees for a long time now. It's the same methodology used under the Young BoCC, the Gardner BoCC, and those before them. Until now, it hasn't been politicized to the extent some of you seem to want to do. Instead, it is a straight forward budgeting and planning exercise and at its heart, the methodology is driven by cost – the cost to build schools. When the cost to build goes up, the fees must go up, too. It's just that simple.

Now, all of you on the dais, and the rest of us here in attendance, aren't here to decide upon a bill to change the methodology for how impact fees are calculated. You aren't here to decide upon a bill to change how FCPS designs and costs schools. Rest assured, none of us are here to listen to a child-less man posture about how simple & easy school redistricting can be! You've already been told that it would be illegal to try and impose politically-motivated, retroactive fees on one specific development, so you're not here debating that, either. Lastly, you also aren't here to decide upon a bill to radically revise how the burden of new growth is shouldered in Frederick County.

You see, none of those bills have been written. None of them have been put forth. And none of them are under consideration tonight. You are here on a much simpler task. The County has a long-standing methodology for calculating fees and when costs go up, the fees must go up. It's just that simple.

The results of inaction are equally simple. You see, we have a problem right now. Schools are over-crowded, costs have increased on new school construction and we can't afford the new schools desperately needed in this County. Some of you want to ignore that reality. You take solace at county-wide averages that are probably some place in the 80 percentile range of state-rated capacity. You look down from 50,000 feet and all looks well in your world. Meanwhile, in the real world, half of the County's elementary schools are over the goal of 90% of state-rated capacity. One third are over 100%. At those schools, children are crammed into classrooms, and portables substitute for real buildings. At those schools, our children are being short-changed.

So you can sit there, and you can ignore that reality. You can listen to the whispers from the developers in your ears and you can ignore the families in front of you. You can ignore the incontrovertible fact that school construction costs have risen. You can ignore the simple reality that fees need to increase when costs increase. You can fail to do what's needed now and just kick the can down the road.

You can do that, but know this. The problem will only get worse. The schools get more over-crowded as the new houses continue going up. The CIP deficit to build new schools will widen. You can deal with the problem now, and each year, or you can ignore it ... until you can't ignore it anymore. I urge you to do the right thing. It's a simple decision. Costs have gone up, and now you need to raise the fees. Thank you.