

Issue of fairness

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There is a good deal of bad blood these days between the [Frederick](#) County Commissioners and a number of the county's 12 independent municipalities. Some of it involves the power struggle over what happens to land that borders municipalities.

The proposed new comprehensive plan would rezone some properties near municipal borders, changing their potential for development and their value to both their owners and the municipalities.

And last year, the annexation by the City of [Frederick](#) of several properties north of town sparked a war of sorts. The county argued that the annexations would create infrastructure costs involving sewer service, schools and highway projects. The city's position was essentially that the annexations had been openly planned for years and that the county should "butt out."

A different sort of sore spot involves reimbursement to the municipalities for services such as road maintenance, parks and law enforcement. When municipalities provide such services, they relieve the county of the effort and expense of having to do it.

As things stand, the repayment amount is calculated by a tax equity formula, but in bad economic times the county can reduce its reimbursement to municipalities. That lower payback can put municipalities in a financial bind, having already spent money they thought would be reimbursed to them.

Sen. David Brinkley, who has been busy and productive this session, introduced a bill that would keep [Frederick](#) County's municipalities from coming up short on reimbursement, and last Friday's 47 to 0 vote in the Senate indicates his fellow lawmakers think he got it right.

Under the current system, city and county officials meet and come up with a tax equity formula. The trouble with that method is that there is no minimum payment, so municipalities can get shorted when times are tough. Brinkley's bill would institute a flat amount that municipalities would receive each year from the county. That amount would increase if county revenue rises.

Brinkley calls it a "fairness issue for people who pay taxes in municipalities to get some of that back for duplication of services."

Fellow local delegation member Sen. Alex Mooney is co-sponsoring the bill with Brinkley. An identical bill is being worked in the House and, according to Delegate Galen Clagett, is "going" -- i.e., he expects it to succeed.

Brinkley's characterization of this reimbursement as a "fairness issue" is exactly right. That seems apparent to his fellow senators and, if Clagett is right, to his fellow delegates as well.

We look forward to this bill's success in the coming days and to Gov. Martin O'Malley signing it into law. Let's give residents living in the county's municipalities a fair shake when it comes to paying taxes where they live, as well as to the county.