

For Schools or Stores?

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Every time a new retail development is proposed in Eastern Jackson County, more times than not it comes with a tax increment financing plan. These plans often generate a lot of community debate, because they take state and local property taxes that would go to the school districts, libraries and other entities and put them in a special fund that helps pay for part of the development costs. The plans usually last anywhere from 10 to 20 years. Because school districts receive more property taxes than most other taxing jurisdictions, they tend to be affected the most. Local school officials often find themselves in the middle, getting lobbied by city officials and developers for support, while taking note of how much money the use of TIF is costing the district. "We don't oppose growth, and we don't oppose economic development," said Gary Jones, deputy superintendent for the Blue Springs School District. "But we do have concerns when school districts end up funding 80 percent of these projects. We are a growing school district and have to provide services to our kids. It becomes difficult when some of that potential revenue is diverted to economic development projects." Most all area school districts have gone on record opposing TIF plans at certain times, and some have gone as far as to testify in Jefferson City, hoping legislators will enact tougher TIF laws.