

The Newsday logo, featuring the word "Newsday" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font with a red swoosh underline.The logo for "The Point", with "The" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font and "Point" in a larger, bold, black, sans-serif font. A red dot is positioned above the letter "i" in "Point".

Long Islanders weigh in on housing

By Randi F. Marshall
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As budget negotiations intensify, housing remains one of the key issues still on the table. With supporters of Gov. Kathy Hochul's Housing Compact stepping up their very public efforts to push the mandate-focused compact forward, Long Island advocates are taking a different route.

Representatives from key local groups aren't holding news conferences or rallies; they are making their opinions known and providing suggestions and alternatives in behind-the-scenes ways.

The heads of the Long Island Association, Long Island Builders Institute, Association for a Better Long Island and the Long Island Contractors' Association came together earlier this month to send a letter to Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie that emphasized both the areas of agreement and the amendments they'd like to see in any final proposal.

The advocates — LIA's Matt Cohen, LIBI's Mike Florio, ABLI's Kyle Strober and LICA's Marc Herbst — sent copies of the letter to the entire local Senate and Assembly delegations, along with every town supervisor and both county executives.

“Our coalition shares your view that new and diverse housing options are critically important to the New York State economy and the sustainability of our region,” the letter said. But, it added, “No plan, no matter how well-intentioned or how thoughtfully constructed, will be successful without considering relevant local context.”

The LI business leaders supported pieces of the compact, including the funding for infrastructure, the expedited state environmental review process and the push for office space conversion. But they emphasized the need to incentivize, rather than mandate, transit-oriented development and suggested removing the state panel that could override local zoning decisions.

“We are concerned that this proposal could result in overriding municipal home rule, circumventing local input, and potentially inviting out-of-state developers, who do not have a track record of collaborating with our communities, to develop properties here that may be in conflict with the character of those communities,” the letter said.

Instead, the advocacy groups proposed what they called “overlay incentive zoning districts” in a smaller universe of municipalities where added housing was “feasible.” Each of those municipalities would establish a local housing entity to establish an overlay district in the areas it deemed appropriate. Incentives for specific types of housing, including affordable, senior, workforce, transit-oriented and environmentally sustainable projects were suggested. And the organizations even suggested a new STAR-like tax rebate for municipalities that follow through, so existing residents would have reason to support housing creation, too.

Sources tell The Point that since the letter was sent, there’s been a clear, ongoing effort from Long Island elected officials, business leaders and others to encourage Hochul to focus on incentives, rather than mandates, and to arrive at a final plan that’s closer to what the State Senate and Assembly have proposed.

But what’s also clear is that a lot can happen as the budget season clock winds down — and no one is quite sure whether the ultimate Housing Compact will adopt some of the local coalition’s ideas.