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# Coalition supports bill to speed building approvals

The region's development and business communities are once again advocating for legislation that would establish a self-certification program for building permit applications with local governments.

The legislation, sponsored by State Sen. James Gaughran and Assemblyman Steve Stern, aims to speed up the approvals process by requiring municipalities 45 days to approve or deny a building permit application before the applicant could opt to self-certify plans by licensed architects or engineers. The proposed legislation also requires municipalities to provide specific reasons why an application is declined.

The coalition lobbying for the bill is comprised of the Association for a Better Long Island, Long Island Association, Long Island Builders Institute, New York Solar Energy Industries Association and Commercial Industrial Brokers Society of Long Island. In addition, several Long Island municipalities also support the establishment of self-certification programs. The bi-partisan Suffolk County Supervisors Association, as well as the Town of Hempstead, have written letters advocating for the legislation.

Self certification, also known as professional certification, allows qualified licensed architects and engineers to approve several steps in the permitting process for construction projects – things like architectural

plans, wastewater flow and landscape design – instead of waiting for municipal reviewers to get around to it.

The program would reduce the backlog of applications the Long Island development community is facing where, as a result of COVID-19, some building departments have months-long backlogs. The self-certification program has already existed in New York City for 25 years and has made the city's approvals process more streamlined.

This isn't the first time self-certification legislation has been floated. However, the current bill has been amended to give municipalities a 45-day window to complete their building permit reviews before self-certification can takeover.

Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, said self certification creates jobs and economic activity and saves local municipal resources that can be dedicated to far more pressing matters.

"This self-certification legislation would establish timelines for approvals or denials, which is critical in the construction process," Strober said. "When it takes more than 100 days to simply review a building permit application, it hinders economic development in our region and costs us all."

Mitch Pally, CEO of the Long Island Builders Institute, said if the legislation becomes law, municipalities will then have



to enact their own rules on administering the self-certification process.

"This is just the first step," Pally said.

Advocates say self-certification programs are used to make the permitting process more efficient for projects, save municipal resources and applicant time, as well as generate increased municipal revenue. As a result, they say the program spurs economic development by increasing investment in the municipality, creating jobs and economic activity.

"Self certification has proven to be an effective tool to spur growth in New York City and so the legislation should be approved

to provide more economic development opportunities and equity for Long Island," said Matt Cohen, president and CEO of the Long Island Association. "This will give the business community more certainty and accelerate the timeline for getting shovels in the ground and projects completed safely and more successfully."

Proponents of self-certification say the proposed legislation has a good chance of getting the green light.

"We are very hopeful that this will pass both houses before the end of the legislative session in two weeks," Pally said.

- DAVID WINZELBERG

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