

OPPOSITION TO PART OF HOCHUL'S HOUSING PLAN

2 Democrats against idea of overriding local zoning control

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ALBANY — Two prominent Democrats on Wednesday questioned an aspect of Gov. Kathy Hochul's proposal to expand apartments and backyard cottages in single-family neighborhoods by overriding local zoning as a way to increase affordable housing.

"This would take away the ability of local officials" to regulate accessory dwelling units or ADUs, said State Sen. James Gaughran (D-Northport), chairman of the Senate's Local Government Committee at a budget hearing. "One of the concerns I have is that this law in itself may take away the . . . power of local community boards and members of a city council to really have discretion on these applications."

New York City Mayor Eric Adams agreed. "There is no one-size-fits-all," the Democratic mayor told legislators at the hearing. "I'm sure we can deal with the housing crisis we are facing and local governments can make those decisions in a smart way."

Gaughran and other legislators and business leader have started discussing a possible compromise that would provide incentives to local governments to expand ADUs, rather than a mandate. Any such measure would be subject to approval by the State Legislature, either as part of the budget process or as a stand-alone bill.

Several Democratic and Republican legislators have said they recognize the need to increase affordable housing but they are concerned about overriding local zoning officials to encourage more ADUs — apartments in single-family homes



State Sen. James Gaughran

and backyard cottages.

Hochul's proposal would restrict local zoning laws and local governments by requiring them to accept ADUs unless serious health or safety issues can be proven. The state mandate is intended to quickly expand ADUs to combat the shortage in affordable housing statewide, but which is especially acute on Long Island and in New York City.

Progressive advocates of Hochul's proposal support the state mandate because they say some local governments have restricted the approval of ADUs to keep minorities out of single-family neighborhoods during a critical shortage of affordable housing.

"We are not keeping pace with our housing production," said RuthAnne Visnauskas, Hochul's commissioner of housing and community renewal at Wednesday's budget hearing. "So there is a real demand for housing, especially in New York City and on Long Island."

She said the crisis includes homeless families that can't afford rent or mortgages, senior citizens paying high taxes to stay in their family home, and generations of a family that want to help support each other in one home.

However, some legislators in state budget hearings this year said that ADUs that aren't regu-

lated by local officials would increase traffic; deteriorate streets and bridges; create parking problems; and burden sewer and water services while transforming single-family neighborhoods into multifamily neighborhoods.

"Other state and local officials, from both sides of the aisle, are joining the call to stop Hochul's reckless proposal to undermine local governments and destroy single family neighborhoods statewide," said another Democrat, Rep. Tom Suozzi of Glen Cove. He raised the issue two weeks ago as part of his campaign for the party's nomination against Hochul.

Republicans statewide have launched efforts to criticize Hochul's proposal. For example, Hempstead Town Supervisor Don Clavin in a news conference last week said an expansion of ADUs would "alter suburban quality of life that we currently enjoy. We will not stand for the assault on our family-friendly communities."

On Wednesday, Gaughran suggested a possible compromise:

"Maybe there are ways we, in the state, can incentivize the city and local governments with these kinds of housing."

The idea has some bipartisan support.

"If you want to incentivize ADUs, by all means," said Assemb. Mike Lawler (R-Pearl River) in a Jan. 31 budget hearing on housing. "But to promote a one-size-fits-all is irresponsible and will lead to elimination of the local control of zoning."

The Association for a Better Long Island and the Long Island Builders Institute also suggested an incentive rather than a mandate. The groups called ADUs a "Band-Aid" that won't meet the enormous need for affordable housing.

"The governor has put the issue on the forefront," said Mitch Pally, CEO of the Long Island Builders Institute. "Whether her solutions are the best solutions is a discussion we can have."

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