



\$87.5M for housing

Counties' plan offers financial incentives to local communities; LIA criticizes it for lack of inclusionary zoning

BY RICK BRAND

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Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy, leading a downstate coalition of seven suburban counties, launched an \$87.5-million proposal yesterday to spur new affordable housing by offering communities financial incentives to help shoulder projects.

Levy said the initiative is the outgrowth of common regional worries that the counties' brightest young people can't stay here because of high real estate prices.

"The crisis is now," Levy said at a news conference in Hauppauge. "The suburbs have been shut out for many people who want to experience the American dream."

But the proposal for new state legislation immediately brought criticism from the head of Long Island's largest business group, the Long Island Association, for its lack of a provision for "inclusionary zoning" to require builders to make workforce housing part of any new development.

"Incentive alone will not solve Long Island's affordable housing problem," said association president Matthew Crosson. "You have to have inclusionary zoning."

Levy's initiative, in the works for a year, calls for state funding of \$87.5 million over the next five years to encourage local communities to voluntarily create special areas where developers would be able to erect at least 25 percent more units than zoning allows if at least 20 percent are affordable.

Local government would get carrots including cash payments for every building permit issued. Extra school costs would be reimbursed and zero-interest loans would be available for infrastructure costs such as roads and sewers.

The new initiative comes

after an LIA-backed proposal to create an inclusionary housing law has stalled in Albany for several years. It was originally sponsored by former Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli, now the state comptroller, and former State Sen. Michael Balboni, now the state homeland security czar.

Crosson said he is in talks with Senate Deputy Majority Leader Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre), and is optimistic for prospects for a revised bill. Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi, who did not attend the news conference, said later he supports both incentives and inclusionary zoning.

Levy said the controversial provision was left out to avoid "scaring off" officials in Hudson Valley counties who are cool to the idea. Levy said he always has supported inclusionary zoning and would support a special provision for Nassau and Suffolk alone.

"The two concepts are complementary, but I believe the incentive approach will, in the end, get a lot more housing done," said Levy. "We can't be waiting four more years to promote the idea."

Some, however, worry that the incentive proposal might hurt efforts to gain support for inclusionary zoning. "If incentives advance ahead on their own without dovetailing with the other piece, it could be dangerous from a legislative standpoint," said John Cameron, chairman of the Long Island Regional Planning Board.

Tom Dunham, Skelos' spokesman, said Senate officials are waiting to see details of Levy's plan. Dunham acknowledged that talks also are under way with Crosson to build "more flexibility" into his plan, but added it is "still a fluid situation."

Levy declined to say how much housing the new initiative would create, saying it will depend on what form the final bill — yet to be drafted — will take and how the money is leveraged with other funding.

Babylon Supervisor Steve Bellone, who attended the news conference, said the new approach is better than trying to put mandates on towns. "If you want to solve the problem, you have to change the equation," he said. "That's what this proposal does. It says you are not going to be harmed by this development."

Robert Wiebolt, executive vice president of the Long Island Builders Institute, also supported the proposal. "If the counties want to dig in and get things done, this is the way to do it," he said. "If you build it, they will stay."

'The suburbs have been shut out for many people who want to experience the American dream.'

Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy



Levy, leading a downstate coalition of seven suburban counties, announces the housing plan.

Affordable Housing Initiative

Funding:
\$87.5 million over five years

Participants:
Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, Dutchess, Putnam and Orange counties.

Goal:
To get towns and villages to voluntarily create areas where developers would be allowed to construct at least 25 percent more units than allowed under current zoning if at least 20 percent are affordable.

Eligibility:
Half of the affordable units would have to go to those earning no more than 80 percent of the area median income (\$75,050 for a family of four); the other half would go to those earning up to 120 percent of median income (\$112,550 for family of four)

Incentives:
Cash payments for every affordable unit built; extra school aid for extra students; zero-interest loans for infrastructure such as roads and sewers.

SOURCE: SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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