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HOUSING BILL

How Hochul pulled back on plan to expand housing stock **A7**

Call led to pulling bill

Senator: Housing plan changes after phone meeting

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY
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ALBANY — A private meeting Monday between Long Island's Democratic senators and Gov. Kathy Hochul was a critical moment in Hochul's decision to pull her proposal to require local governments to accept more apartments and backyard cottages in neighborhoods, according to a senator who attended.

On Monday, as opposition was mounting on Long Island, Hochul telephoned Long Island's five Democratic senators to discuss her bill, said Sen. James Gaughran (D-Syosset). The discussion soon moved to the governor's small conference room adjacent to her private office in the Capitol. The meeting lasted less than hour, but it was clear from those attending that the governor was rethinking how to achieve her goal of creating affordable housing, said Gaughran.

While supporting the concept of "accessory dwelling units," sometimes called granny flats or mother-daughter apartments, the senators unanimously opposed mandating them on local governments and urged more discussion to create a new approach.

On Thursday night, Hochul pulled her bill out of the executive budget proposal she made in January. She told senators she would instead create a task force with local officials, building interests and affordable housing advocates to recast the proposal and sell its attributes to build support. There is no date set on when a revised proposal might be taken up or if it will resurface before the scheduled end of the legislative session on June 2.

'A frank discussion'

"It was a frank discussion and Governor Hochul really understands the issue," said Gaughran. "This is what working together instead of grandstanding gets you. And it worked."

Hochul's bill sought to combat a critical shortage of affordable housing statewide, but which is most acute on Long Island and in



Gov. Kathy Hochul called LI's Democratic senators on Monday to discuss "accessory dwelling units."

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New York City. Her proposal would have required local governments to accept ADU applications for apartments, additions and backyard "tiny homes" regardless of local zoning unless serious health and safety violations were proven.

Opponents argued that Hochul's proposal would harm suburban neighborhoods by worsening parking problems and straining local services, including sewer and water facilities, while eliminating local control of zoning.

The governor did continue part of the ADU proposal: bringing units located in New

York City into compliance with building and safety codes. Many of the units in the city and in suburbs were built without local approval and are believed to have safety concerns.

Monday's meeting came as Republicans and some Democrats, including Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-Glen Cove), who is challenging Hochul for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, dialed up the political heat over the issue and as Hochul faced a Thursday night deadline to formally amend her budget proposal.

Part of the political pressure was the rising Republican opposition to the proposal sought by progressives. Political observers said Democrats were

wary that passing the measure would alienate their larger base of more centrist, suburban voters and put moderate Long Island senators at risk in the fall elections by providing a cudgel for Republicans.

"This went over like a lead balloon," said Assemb. Michael Fitzpatrick (R-Smithtown), the ranking Republican on the Assembly Housing Committee. "People want to live in single-family areas as they move up the ladder."

He said the Democrats had to juggle the demands of their progressive members with how it would play with moderate voters on Long Island. "I think what may have pushed it over was the effect it might have had

on Long Island Democrats," Fitzpatrick said.

Local officials on Long Island and in Westchester had opposed what they saw as an assault on local communities' power to protect their neighborhoods.

'They made a choice'

"This is the biggest investment in their lives and they made a choice," said Hempstead Supervisor Don Clavin in an interview with Newsday on Friday. "They wanted to defend it and they felt she was trying to steal it."

The town's online petition — "Stop Governor Hochul's Urbanization Plan!" — started two weeks ago. As of midday Friday, 12,357 signatures were collected.

"We've never had such a response in such a quick fashion from residents," Clavin said. "It's a victory for the thousands of residents who stood beside us."

Sen. Phil Boyle (R-Bay Shore) said Hochul "clearly only sought input from New York City-based stakeholders" in crafting her bill and a "tidal wave of opposition" changed her mind.

"Republican elected officials at all levels of government, along with countless New York residents, soon reminded her that we prefer our suburban way of life," Boyle said.

Revising Hochul's proposal may be difficult because supporters believed a mandate was needed to get local governments to accept more ADUs and force more diversity and lower-cost housing into neighborhoods.

"I understand Governor Hochul's decision," said Sen. Pete Harckham (D-South Salem), who co-sponsors an active bill that is similar to Hochul's proposal.

"This action highlights our primary concern, which is to get all of the details of the bill right, rather than enact a bill right away," Harckham said. "I will continue to engage with stakeholders and work to settle all concerns with this legislation. It is important that we keep driving a conversation, however, on affordable housing for our workforce and equitable treatment for our residents."

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