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## State Senate passes Adirondack housing bill

By JON ALEXANDER

Groups from across the spectrum of debate on Adirondack issues are praising legislation that will make available more space for low-income housing in the Adirondack Park.

The state Senate unanimously passed the Adirondack Community Housing Bill 62-0 on Thursday, following unanimous passage Wednesday in the state Assembly. If signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, the legislation will allow clustered development on private lands that had previously been deemed off-limits by regional land use controls.

State Sen. Elizabeth Little, R-Queensbury, sponsored the Senate draft, which was originally proposed in 2009 by the Adirondack Park Agency.

"By allowing some clustering of modest homes on one parcel, it limits sprawl and will keep the price of new homes at a level people can afford," Little said in a statement Thursday.

The bill will allow the construction of up to four housing units on a single parcel of land in "moderate" and "low intensity" zoning that is located up to three miles outside an Adirondack hamlet.

Before this law, clustered development was typically permitted only in hamlets.

APA Legal Counsel John Banta has said the lack of affordable housing has been on the APA's agenda for a while and "is a major problem in the park."

The bill bans the clustered housing projects within one-tenth of a mile of a shoreline.

Affordable housing has become an issue in towns with large populations of well-heeled second-home owners.

The Assembly draft was sponsored by Environmental Conservation Committee Chairman Robert Sweeney, D-Lindenhurst, and co-sponsored by Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, R-Willsboro.

"This legislation will go a long way in allowing people to achieve the American dream," Sayward said.

And Sayward noted that the legislation marks a rare occurrence of regional collectivism.

"I was pleased to take part in a collaborative effort with the senator, local officials and the APA to accomplish this important initiative," she said.

The legislation has been in the works for nearly three years, as APA officials and area legislators hammered out the details. Several sticking points that held up the bill have been removed or amended. Local legislators objected to a provision that would have required the four houses to share a common septic system. The common septic requirement is not present in the adopted legislation.

Homes are also limited to 1,500 square feet and owners will have to meet income levels of 120 percent or less of the median family income of the county where the structure will be located.

"To their (APA's) credit, they listened and addressed every one of our concerns," said Fred Monroe, executive director of the Adirondack Local Government Review Board. "I think it's a real plus and will solve a lot of the housing problems in the Adirondacks."

The Affordable Housing Bill was originally proposed as a part of a three-bill APA reform package.

The other two bills, which are supported by green groups but haven't gained the acceptance of local governments, have remained stalled in the Legislature.

"We are curious as to why the other two bills aren't moving," said John Sheehan, spokesman for the Adirondack Council.

APA officials argue that one of the stalled bills would streamline the Agency's review of proposed projects. Little and local governments have been critical of the legislation because it would allow the APA to deny a proposal without holding a public hearing.

The other stalled bill is designed to fund local municipal planning projects by creating a planning fund. But it, too, has been controversial with local governments and area state legislators because it would fund the program through additional APA permitting fees.

The agency has negotiated the permit fees issue and exempted smaller projects in the revised draft of the Municipal Planning Fund legislation.

Following Senate approval, the housing legislation will return to the Assembly floor for reconciliation. Cuomo could sign the bill within the next week.

"The Adirondack Park Agency is very pleased that the Adirondack Community Housing Bill is moving through the state Legislature and we look forward to it being signed into law," said APA Chairman Curt Stiles.