

OUR OPINION

Legislation to ban local moratoriums is wrong approach

Legislation that would sharply limit the ability of Minnesota counties, cities and townships to approve moratoriums on land-use decisions has stirred back to life in the Senate.

That's unfortunate because the legislation is a horrible idea that, if it became law, would put more power in state hands at a time when keeping land-use under local control seems much the wiser course of action. Present state law allows counties, townships and municipalities to adopt moratoriums on land-use decisions to give them more time to consider zoning or other changes. The bill, at present, would prevent moratoriums from stopping development projects that have sent in completed applications.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Michael Beard, R-Shakopee, paints the issues as one about personal property rights.

Similar legislation has been floated in St. Paul for several years, but Beard thinks that with Republican and Democratic lawmakers seemingly in a more compromising mood it has a better chance of passage.

The legislation would be felt immediately.

If it was already law, Goodhue, Wabasha and Winona counties would not have been able to put moratoriums on the mining of silica sand. Silica sand mining is an emotional issue for residents in those counties, and authorities were doing all due diligence when they halted the project until more information was available so they could understand the issue better.

That's the position taken by Annalee Garletz of the Association of Minnesota Counties. She told the Associated Press that local governments need the ability to deal with development proposals they haven't anticipated before.

Beard thinks his legislation has a reasonable chance of passage.

We hope that it doesn't because local government entities — be they townships, counties or municipalities — have proven more responsive to the desires of their citizens than state government has shown itself to be.

Minnesota and the nation needs projects that promise employment opportunities. It can certainly be frustrating when a project organizer's paperwork has been approved by the state and the project is red-lighted by local authorities. However, the local authorities most times have their ears well-tuned to citizens' concerns.

State authorities should not intercede in decisions that local elected officials make.