



Published: February 16, 2012

By Andrew Kitchenman

A bill that would encourage turning abandoned, foreclosed houses into affordable or work force housing was advanced today by the Senate Economic Growth Committee.

The bill received the backing of an unlikely coalition, from business groups to housing and environmental advocates.

"The ground did open up a little bit," said Timothy J. Touhey, CEO of the New Jersey Builders Association, referring to the unlikely mix of advocacy groups that supported the issue.

The bill includes a mixture of different provisions, including giving municipalities a "two-for-one" bonus credit for affordable housing that is converted from each abandoned house.

"I think this is an innovative policy," said Michael Cerra, senior legislative analyst of the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

Any concerns housing advocates may have about the bonus are far outweighed by the potential benefits of the bill, according to Staci Berger, director of policy and advocacy at the Housing & Community Development Network of New Jersey. "Overall, we think this is a really great bill," Berger said.

Berger added that it's important to pass the bill quickly, due to the large number of foreclosures — and to head off a July deadline for municipal housing trust funds to commit to projects.

Along with the state associations of Realtors, bankers and builders, the New Jersey Mortgage Bankers Association added its voice in support of the bill on Thursday.

Assemblyman Jerry Green (D-Plainfield) has signed on to be the Assembly sponsor of the bill, but that version had not been introduced by Thursday morning.

