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Bauer-Kahan not in step with Lamorinda on housing bills

By Nick Marnell



District 16 Assemblywoman Rebecca Bauer-Kahan Photo provided

When asked about her stance on local government control over housing by this newspaper in October, District 16 Assemblywoman Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, D-Orinda, who went on to defeat incumbent Catharine Baker in the general election, spoke unequivocally. "We cannot take local control away from the cities and counties that know best how to tackle our housing crisis, while not overburdening our schools, emergency services, roads and other infrastructure," Bauer-Kahan said.

Yet, on two high profile assembly bills that featured state control over local housing, Bauer-Kahan did not vote against them. In fact, she did not vote at all.

Assembly Bill 1482, which passed May 29, caps rent increases at 7% a year, plus the rate of inflation, with some exceptions. In the November general election, Contra Costa County voters rejected Proposition 10, which called for expanded rent control, with 67% against. In Lamorinda, the votes tallied more than 2-to-1 against.

"We know that rent control does not work," Lafayette Mayor Mike Anderson said at a January city council meeting, stressing that rent control only results in higher rents. In a 2019 position statement on housing recommendations, the Contra Costa Public Managers' Association did not endorse rent control.

None of the above facts or positions convinced Bauer-Kahan, whose district includes Lamorinda, to vote against AB 1482.

The assemblywoman said the problem she had voting on 1482 was that it was the first floor vote she encountered in her six months in Sacramento that came down with amendments at the last minute. "I didn't have a chance to review it and I didn't know how it would affect our voters, so I was uncomfortable voting on it," Bauer-Kahan said.

AB 1487, also passed in May, would place before voters a regional housing authority that would increase affordable housing in the Bay Area by raising revenue and distributing the funds subject to voter approved requirements.

"We support utilizing each county's existing housing authority ... to serve as the governance structure that administers new affordable housing funds and monitor housing production rather than establishing yet another agency to take on that role," was the position stated by the Contra Costa Public Managers' Association, which Moraga Town Manger Cynthia Battenberg said reflected the town's position.

In a May 13 letter to the state assembly members, Orinda Mayor Inga Miller asked that they vote no on the bill. "The framework proposed by AB 1487 not only will be costly to cities, counties and the State of California but also is unnecessary since existing housing authorities can already perform the tasks called for in AB 1487," Miller wrote.

"We discussed it at the Mayors' Conference in Lafayette and it was pretty clear that the cities that I represent opposed it," Bauer-Kahan said of AB 1487. Yet again, she did not vote against the bill. The freshman assemblywoman said that parts of the bill are still in good faith negotiation, and even though the bill "was not in a place where I could offer support, I agreed to not oppose it.

"If we don't get the amendments we are looking to get, I will without hesitation oppose it when it's returned to the assembly," Bauer-Kahan said, referring to the makeup of the proposed agency and the amount of funds returned to source.

Both bills have moved on to the State Senate.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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