

Bill awaiting Crist's signature would gut Florida's controls on development, opponents say

By [PAUL QUINLAN](#) and [JENNIFER SORENTTRUE](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writers

Monday, May 18, 2009

Florida's county governments and environmental groups are pushing Gov. Charlie Crist to veto a bill they say would encourage urban sprawl, worsen traffic congestion and eliminate important safeguards that normally apply to development proposals.

Developers argue that the bill is needed to revive Florida's economy by jump-starting its stalled building industry.

Crist has until June 2 to either sign or veto the measure. But he is expected to act sooner, perhaps later this week.

The state's development czar, Community Affairs Secretary Tom Pelham, has yet to take a position on the latest version of the bill, a spokeswoman said. Palm Beach County officials said he's hosting a conference call later this week to explain the effects of the bill, which some interpret as a sign of support.

Among other flaws in the bill, the environmental group Audubon of Florida cites provisions that would make it easier for a city or county to create an "urban service area" where large-scale developments would be exempt from the state's typical review process.

Those big developments also would no longer face requirements that adequate roads and other transportation amenities be in place before a developer may build, Audubon lobbyist Charles Lee said. Under existing law, such requirements often force developers to pay for road expansions before they can build.

In a letter to Crist, Audubon Deputy Director Eric Draper wrote that "it is simply not appropriate to allow any small city or town, or any county no matter how rural, to establish a safe haven for large scale land development activities that escape the (review) process."

But Wade Hopping, a lobbyist for the Association of Florida Community Developers, said it's unfair to require developers to make up for the pileup of needed transportation improvements.

"Most developers have accepted their responsibility for paying for their share of growth," said Hopping. "What they don't accept responsibility for is paying for backlog."

Supporters of the bill argue that existing growth rules discourage the redevelopment of urban areas by saddling developers with exorbitant costs.

But Florida Association of Counties spokeswoman Cragin Mosteller said the bill could saddle residents with the burdens of unwise development.

"You could conceivably have a great, brand-new housing development on a two-lane country road with no plans for improvements," she said.

Palm Beach County Commissioner Karen Marcus also expressed concern about a provision in the bill that would prohibit local governments from requiring businesses to pay for security cameras.

"By prohibiting a local government from implementing minimum safety standards ... intended to protect individuals, businesses and law enforcement officers themselves, the state is removing law enforcement's ability to utilize one of the best investigatory tools available," Marcus wrote in a letter urging Crist to veto the bill.

County officials are still trying to sort out all of the effects the bill might have, said assistant county attorney Lenny Berger.

~'paul_quinlan@pbpost.com

http://www.palmbeachpost.com/business/content/local_news/epaper/2009/05/18/0518growthbill.html