



Hammer time

New bill would speed LI building projects

By DAVID WINZELBERG

A new bill that would allow Long Island municipalities to use a professional certification program to streamline the building permitting process has been introduced in the state Senate.

State Sen. Phil Boyle is sponsoring the proposed legislation that would authorize municipalities within Suffolk and Nassau counties to grant and expedite residential and commercial building permits to licensed professional engineers and registered architects for interior renovations.

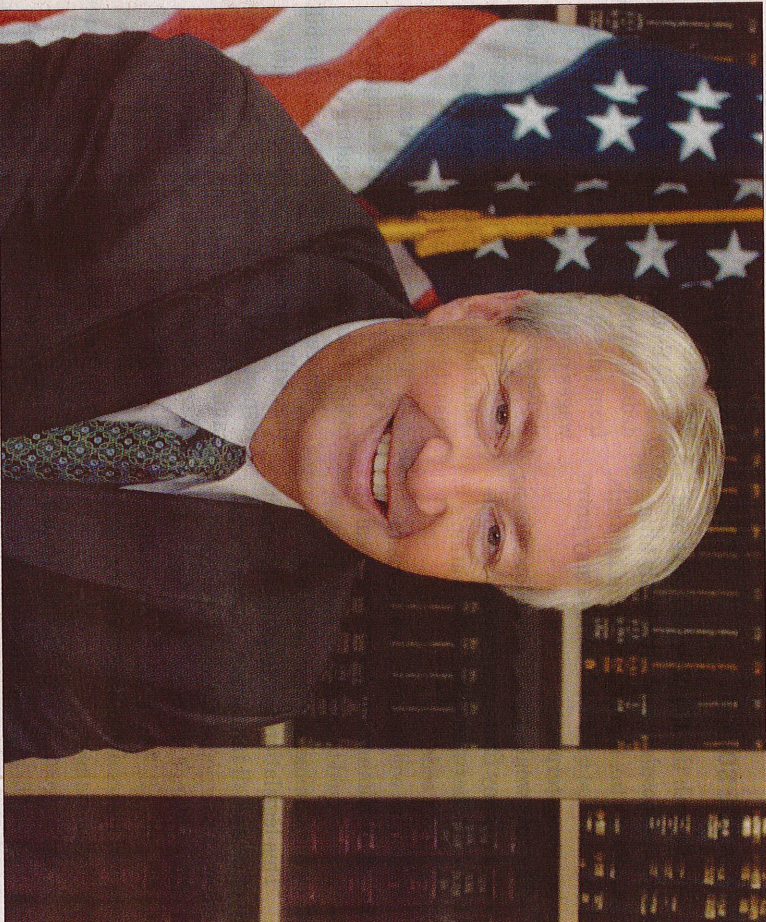
The initiative, long sought after by the development community, lets contractors use architects and engineers to certify that the work they are doing is up to code. Currently, New York City is the only municipality in the state that's authorized to utilize professional certification to speed the building process.

Boyle called obtaining approval for a building permit here "an extremely cumbersome and time-consuming" process.

"This legislation to create a professional certification program for engineers and architects that will allow municipalities to have a more streamlined process, which reduces red tape and will save municipalities time, money and resources without compromising safety," Boyle said. "I am thrilled with the prospect of bringing this economic development program, which has worked extremely well in New York City, to Long Island."

Assemblyman Fred Thiele will be introducing the same bill in the Assembly soon.

Mitchell Pally, CEO of the Long Island Builders Institute, said his group and the Association for a Better Long Island have been talking about adopt-



STATE SEN. PHIL BOYLE: Professional certification program will cut red tape for interior renovations.

ing professional certification here for a long time.

"We approached Sen. Boyle and he was gracious enough to introduce the bill and we are very hopeful it will pass this session," Pally told LIBN.

The proposed professional certification program would only apply to modifications to existing residential and commercial building structures under limited circumstances, though it could include electrical and plumbing work as well, at the discretion of each municipality. The program would apply to interior work which maintains fire egress standards, maintains the previous fire rating standard and does not alter the bearing walls or ADA accessibility.

"The hope is because there are a limited number of municipal inspectors, they can now spend their time on larger projects because they'll no longer be bogged down with smaller

projects," Pally said.

Pally added that private architects and engineers who certify that work is up to code are putting their licenses on the line, which offers a good measure of assurance that corners aren't being cut.

Opponents of similar efforts to bring professional certification have said that the program decreases the power of local building departments and could even cut some permit fees, reducing revenue to the municipality.

But supporters say professional certification is an effective way to cut red tape, speed up the building process and save money at the same time. The proposed program wouldn't be mandatory, however, giving each municipality the choice to opt in or out.

The bill, which Boyle says has a "good chance" of getting passed, is currently in the Senate Rules Committee.

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