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## The Patriot-News

### Development pressures

### **Municipalities ought to be able to declare a brief timeout to adjust to new patterns**

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When local officials draw up land-use ordinances, they are to a considerable extent expected to see into the future and anticipate everything that might impact the community that would be subject to reasonable regulation.

In fact, times change. New technologies and concepts, as well as development patterns, appear on the scene. Municipalities need the time to adjust when they have reason to believe their existing ordinances inadequately protect the community.

Likewise, the many rural communities in Pennsylvania that resist land-use regulation in expectation that their remoteness protects them may need to reconsider that view as growth and development creep closer.

Under House Bill 904, sponsored by Reps. Bob Freeman, D-Northampton, and Bernie O'Neill, R-Bucks, municipalities would have the option to declare a moratorium of up to 18 months on new development by suspending the acceptance of applications for development. Municipal officials would have to show that such a pause was needed to prevent overburdening essential public facilities or to "prevent serious public harm" resulting from the absence or inadequacy of existing ordinances.

Municipalities had imposed such moratoriums until 2001, when the state Supreme Court ruled that they had no statutory authority to do so. HB 904 would fill that void by requiring public hearings for any proposed moratorium and review by the county. It would assure developers the right to seek a waiver if the development consisted of 10 units or less, posed a significant hardship on a landowner or developer or would not compromise the purpose of the revisions in local ordinances.

In the ideal world, every municipality would engage its citizens in determining the kind of future they want for the community, then draw up a comprehensive plan reflecting that vision. They would enact the appropriate zoning and land-use ordinances to guide them in that direction. And they would periodically reconsider their plan and their ordinances in light of changing circumstances.

But we don't live in the ideal world, nor can every eventuality be predicted. Municipalities ought to be able to declare a brief timeout in order to bring their ordinances in line with changing realities.

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