

Transfer fee bills remain alive at State House

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Two bills that would allow a transfer fee on real estate transactions remain alive at the State House. — Kelsey Perrett

Eight bills that would allow individual municipalities to add a new fee to certain real estate transactions advanced from one legislative committee, while another is taking more time to decide on a proposal that would allow cities and towns to take such a step without first getting Beacon Hill's approval, the State House News Service.

As of Wednesday's deadline for most committees to act on bills, the Housing Committee had put forward an order extending until May 9 its window to advance or reject legislation that would enable municipalities to impose a fee of between 0.5 percent and 2 percent of the price of certain housing transactions in order to generate revenue to preserve affordable housing and fund new home construction, the news service reported.

The Coalition to Create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank has advocated for the passage of these bills, which would pave the way for the Island to set up a housing bank. All six Island towns have agreed to let voters decide this spring whether they support legislation to create a housing bank on Island with money from such a transfer fee.

Four of the six Island towns need to approve the housing bank for it to become established. Towns that don't approve it can opt in later on, and, similarly, towns that want to leave can do so. As currently drafted, the housing bank would consist of seven elected commissioners, each representing one of the Vineyard's six towns, plus one commissioner at large. The legislation also calls for a town advisory board for each town. This is the Island's third attempt at a housing bank. This proposal seeks a 2 percent real estate transfer fee through a mechanism similar to the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank. However, unlike the Land Bank, the first \$1 million of a sale price isn't subject to the 2 percent fee.

A Local Option for Housing Affordability (LOHA) coalition has advocated for the transfer fees.

"We are grateful to the six Island select boards for sending in support for H1377/S868 to the legislature," Laura Silber, coalition coordinator, wrote in an email to The Times. "[The coalition] will continue to work in partnership with Nantucket and the statewide LOHA coalition to advance these bills on Beacon Hill this session."

While the decision could bottle the bills up for three more months, Rep. Mike Connolly, who filed the House version and serves on the Housing Committee, said he viewed the extension as an "encouraging sign," according to the State House News Service. "I'm grateful that we have the opportunity to continue the conversation and look to build consensus around it," he said.

Earlier this week, Boston Mayor Michelle Wu reportedly filed a home-rule petition that would allow her city to impose a fee on sales of \$2 million or more and major employer Mass General Brigham, the parent company of Martha's Vineyard Hospital, earlier this month voiced support for the bills specifically citing the shortage of housing on the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

"We look forward to continuing to work with the legislature on this extremely important issue. It is a vital measure to have enacted this session for communities from Nantucket, to Boston, to Western Massachusetts," Nantucket housing director Tucker Holland said in a statement offered by the coalition.