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SEQRA reform can unlock NY's housing potential. Get it done | Opinion

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Larry Regan Special to the USA TODAY Network

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In the face of [rising rents](#) and [increasingly limited housing](#) options for low- and moderate-income families across Westchester County, we need to remove every possible barrier to building our way out of this affordable housing crisis.

New York is a notoriously difficult and expensive place to build. Some contributing factors — the rising costs of energy, labor, and materials, for example — are beyond our control. But other things, like the complex regulatory requirements that can dramatically — and sometimes unnecessarily, delay projects — are ripe for reform.

Gov. Kathy Hochul's [proposed changes](#) in her fiscal year 2027 executive budget to the State Environmental Quality Review Act — SEQRA — offer a thoughtful path forward, one that balances responsible environmental review with the urgent need for more affordable homes.

Why Kathy Hochul is right to tackle SEQRA

[SEQRA](#) was enacted in 1975 to require that the state and local communities consider environmental impacts — as well as social and economic factors — early in the timeline of proposed projects. Its goal was laudable: to prevent environmental damage and establish a standardized review while providing opportunities for public input to give communities a voice in shaping their surroundings.

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Much has changed since then, and not all of it for the better. Some communities and advocates have used the SEQRA framework to block development that they don't like by creating long delays and uncertainty — particularly for affordable housing projects. Developers can face months or even years of procedural and legal hurdles before breaking ground.

Costs mount with every passing day. At a certain point, the originally proposed project is no longer viable and must be downsized or even cancelled altogether, further limiting housing supply, exacerbating rising housing costs, and limiting opportunities for residents seeking affordable options.

Delays can have a ripple effect, driving up the overall cost of all types of housing construction. In the Mid-Hudson region, a [CBC analysis](#) found that the SEQRA process can increase costs by \$40,000 per unit on residential projects. This not [only prices out](#) many buyers in an area with a severe housing shortage, but also ultimately drives up property taxes.

The Mid-Hudson Valley's Sullivan, Dutchess and Orange counties have some of the highest and fastest-growing property tax rates in the state, in some cases exceeding \$32 per \$1,000 of assessed value, [according to](#) the nonprofit policy, planning and research organization Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress.

Hochul's proposal addresses these challenges by streamlining certain aspects of SEQRA while preserving its core purpose. The reforms aim to reduce unnecessary procedural delays and clarify timelines, making it easier for developers to plan and deliver projects efficiently while controlling costs.

These changes do not diminish community input. Public hearings, comment periods and opportunities to address environmental concerns remain central to the process. Communities will continue to have a meaningful voice, ensuring that projects are both environmentally responsible and reflective of local priorities.

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SEQRA needs to be predictable and efficient

For affordable housing developers like me, these reforms represent an opportunity to fulfill our mission to provide attainable homes for individuals, families, and seniors. By making SEQRA more predictable and efficient, the state can help accelerate the creation of housing while maintaining environmental safeguards.

Supporting SEQRA reform is not about cutting corners, it's about responsibly clearing a path so that more people can access homes that meet their needs. I urge our elected leaders to support SEQRA modernizations that benefits both the environment and our communities in Westchester and across the state.

The governor's commonsense SEQRA reform plan must remain in the final budget agreement that is currently being negotiated in Albany.

Larry Regan is president of Regan Development Corp., a family-run business, that has delivered over \$750 million in residential, commercial and affordable housing projects over the last 30 years.