



Annexation Freeze Gets Tentative OK

BY JOHN KRAHNERT III: NEWSROOM INTERN

The N.C. House has delayed a final vote on a proposed statewide moratorium on involuntary annexation until today (Wednesday).

The legislation, House Bill 2367, would impose a nine-month ban on involuntary annexations by cities and towns. Lawmakers debated the measure Tuesday afternoon, but decided to delay a vote for a day because the bill's sponsors wanted time to consider more amendments.

The House gave preliminary approval to the bill Monday night on a 99-15 vote. The third and final vote is expected to pass by a similarly wide margin.

Should the House pass the bill, it must go to the Senate. But Senate leaders have indicated that they will not consider the legislation.

Passage of the

measure would block the village of Pinehurst's planned annexation of Pinewild Country Club. The Village Council adopted a resolution to annex the gated country club effective June 30, but pending legal action has put those plans on hold.

At least two amendments to the legislation were expected to be considered and voted on Tuesday. Doug Aitken, a Pinewild resident and founder of the Fair Annexation Coalition (FAC) who was in attendance for the vote, said the primary sponsors of the bill wanted more time to sit down and discuss them.

Aitken served on the House Select Committee on Municipal Annexation, which recommended that the General Assembly impose a one-year moratorium on involuntary annexations. The moratorium would give legislators time to craft new annexation laws. Another House committee later amended the bill to make it a nine-month moratorium.

Aitken said he is taking a "wait-and-see" approach on the bill's passage in the House.

"It's going to be interesting," Aitken said, adding that he was unsure of how the amendments were going to affect the moratorium.

He said he hopes the bill stays close to the version that came out of the House Select and Finance committees.

John Boesch, a Pinewild resident, said he was "encouraged" by the vote on the second reading. Boesch and his wife, Lydia, have been instrumental in the anti-annexation movement, founding Stop the Taking of Pinewild (StTOP) and being involved in the FAC. He remained cautiously optimistic about the bill's chances in the House on the final vote.

"I expect it to be a lively debate," Boesch said, referring to the third reading. "There may be amendments, but hopefully they will be pleasing and it will pass with the same majority it did [Monday]."

Pinehurst Village Manager Andy Wilkison said he would not comment on the bill until it had passed the House.

State Rep. Joe Boylan, a co-sponsor of the moratorium bill, could not be reached for comment.

Passage of the bill would be a win for Pinewild residents who are fighting annexation by the village of Pinehurst. They claim the village's plans to annex the country club would subject them to unnecessary taxes for services they do not need.

Two lawsuits, one in federal and one in state courts, were filed to block the annexation. A judge dismissed the state suit. The federal suit is still pending, which prevents the village from proceeding with the annexation.

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