

Albany council fails to override mayor's ADU veto

CAITLYN M. MAY *Albany Democrat-Herald*

The Albany City Council on Wednesday evening could not produce the five votes necessary to override Mayor Sharon Konopa's veto of an ordinance to bring the city into compliance with state law in regards to accessory dwelling units.

"Hearing no action, I guess your motion stands," said Councilor Dick Olsen, breaking the silence that followed after Konopa called for a motion to vote on the veto.

Councilor Rich Kellum said he knew there weren't enough votes to override the veto, so he was unwilling to make a motion. But he wound up seconding a motion made by Councilor Bessie Johnson.

Councilors Bill Coburn and Olsen voted against the motion, leaving the majority one vote short of an override.

"I know this has been said many times but when you have city staff, the Planning Commission, City Council, twice, actually three times saying that this is wanted, I don't understand why one person can rule what the majority says," Johnson said in support of her motion. "We have had many testimonies for it and I feel that some want to stay in the '50s, into a utopian 'OK, let's put a bubble around us and not do anything.' We can't do that. You're going to have to be progressive at one point."

In August 2017, the state passed legislation that required cities with populations of more than 2,500 people to allow the accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in areas zoned for detached single-family homes. Albany currently allows ADUs up to 750 square feet but only in some areas of the city. To comply with state law, the city has to amend its development code.

The council remains split on the size of ADUs with Konopa believing that the proposed 900-square-foot allowance is too large. In addition, concerns about parking and whether ADU owners must occupy the dwelling are major sticking points.

"To me, it's disrespect to everyone who invested in their single-family neighborhoods and it's not just me, it's me plus two councilors that are in disagreement, but I have not heard one substantial reason to support lessening our rules on ADUs," Konopa said. "We're not denying them, the ADUs can still be built, but don't open up that floodgate to allow them in the whole community."

Councilor Alex Johnson, who was elected to the board after the issue of ADUs initially came before the board last year, said he was still researching the issue.

"People are going to come here no matter what," Councilor Bessie Johnson said, noting that she didn't believe ADUs were solely for low-income individuals. "It's like telling people, 'Well, I don't want you to do that,' but only a couple of people are saying that and I don't think it's the democratic way."

At the close of the meeting, Kellum said he would be willing to negotiate on the issue and felt the majority had made some concessions in the matter. Konopa said she, Olsen and Coburn had made concessions as well.

"We changed a little bit," Kellum said. "I expected change from the other side and didn't get it. So, we're where we're at."