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Surveying local progress on affordable housing plans

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Four towns have submitted plans on how many affordable houses and apartments they can provide and the other 210 are in the process of doing so, state Community Affairs Commissioner Joseph Doria said yesterday.

The towns must have their plans in to the Council on Affordable Housing by Dec. 31.

COAH director Lucy Vanderberg said Sandyston, Frankford, Ewing and Woodcliff Lake have submitted their plans. She provided information that shows the remaining 210 towns have had their plans approved by their councils or planning boards or have them under review by the panels.

Doria, who is also chairman of COAH, said he wanted to clarify a report that appeared on nj.com yesterday that stated he would not grant an extension of the Dec. 31 deadline, something sought by some legislators and local officials.

Doria said he does not have the power to grant an extension and that it would take a vote by the majority of the COAH board at a special meeting before the end of the month to do so.

"I can't take action by myself," he said. "It has to be acted on by the board." At present, no meeting is planned.

Doria said extension requests by Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts (D-Camden) and Sens. Raymond Lesniak (D-Union) and Christopher "Kip" Bateman (R-Somerset) are under consideration. The lawmakers are seeking three- to six-month extensions. They argue that the towns need more time to present solid plans.

Asked if he would support an extension, Doria said the board could be forced to consider one if legislation were introduced calling for one.

Bridgewater has had its plan approved by the township council, and in Flemington, the council is reviewing the borough's plan, according to COAH. The towns of Chatham, Dover, Fredon, Green Brook, Harding, Hopewell Township, Metuchen and Montvale have had their plans approved by their planning boards.

Doria said the actions indicate towns can meet the deadline. He said once a plan is submitted, COAH has 30 days to review it and make technical corrections. A 45-day public review period follows, after which a town can work with COAH on a final plan. He said he expects plans submitted by Dec. 31 will be approved by May at the latest.

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