

Hub councilors nix measure pushing tenant union talks

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The Hub's latest bid to rein in sky-high apartment rents went down in defeat yesterday.

The Boston City Council voted 8-5 against a measure that would have penalized landlords who refused to sit down at the negotiating table with tenant unions.

The vote came in the wake of a fierce backlash by Boston's real estate community, which argued the proposal was yet another attempt to bring back a form of rent control. Boston and Cambridge eliminated caps on rents in the 1990s.

City Councilor Sam Yoon, the proposal's chief sponsor, said the result was "not unexpected" but still disappointing, noting he had taken out a number of provisions objectionable to local landlords. "We went through a ton of changes, a lot of which responded to the real estate community's concerns," Yoon said.

But opponents, including groups representing Boston's major apartment building owners and developers, were left unconvinced.

The proposal would have fueled a growing new phenomenon of tenant unions and helped them defeat proposed rent increases. This, in turn, would have been a deterrent to investors and builders considering plans to build new apartment buildings, opponents argued.

"Fundamentally, it's not going to solve the problem and, in fact, it may do more harm than good," said Patricia Baumer, government affairs director for the Greater Boston Real Estate Board, of the defeated proposal.

The proposal itself would not have forced landlords to sit down with their tenants. But if they refused, a letter would have gone on file at City Hall to be reviewed the next time the landlord tried to pull a permit or sought some form of city assistance.