

Senate approves Wolk bills on farming, public construction

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The state Senate voted 34-2 Monday to pass a bill meant to protect farmers from lawsuits by ensuring those who buy land in agricultural areas know about the state's right-to-farm laws.

The Senate, by a vote of 31-5, also gave the green light to a bill intended to save cities money and time by using the design-build process on public construction process.

Assemblywoman Lois Wolk, D-Davis, the author of both bills, said in a statement that when housing and other sorts of development stretch into farmland, growers are sometimes sued over dirt, odor and other consequences of normal farming activity.

Assembly Bill No. 2881 would require that anyone who purchases land within a mile of farmland is informed about laws that bar standard farming activities from being treated as a nuisance.

Karen Stone, a rancher, agricultural Realtor and member of the Yolo County Ag Futures Alliance, which is sponsoring the bill, said the bill could improve relationships between farmers and their new neighbors.

"As more and more people move into rural areas, it is increasingly important to safeguard California's future food production," Stone said.

AB 642 would enable all cities to allow a single contractor to perform both architectural and engineering work as well as actual construction on new projects. Existing law allows only cities in Yolo and Solano counties, and the cities of Victorville and Stanton, to utilize the design-build method.

Two years ago, Wolk authored the bill allowing Yolo and Solano that chance. On Monday, she said that had paid off and that the governor should support the bill because it can save local governments money in tough budgetary times. More than 40 cities support the bill, along with a variety of other local government bodies.

The city of Davis' police station was finished a year early and at a savings of \$700,000 using a design-build strategy, Wolk said. Likewise, the new Solano County government building was completed under budget and nine months early with that process.

AB 642 also would create a 20-project, 10-year pilot program for counties, cities and special districts for the construction of local wastewater, local water recycling or local solid waste management facilities. The pilot has a 10-year sunset.

Both bills will now move back to the Assembly for a vote on amendments adopted in the

Senate.

Two other bills penned by Wolk cleared hurdles recently:

* AB 1806, which would require state and federal water projects to minimize adverse effects on Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta fisheries, passes the Senate's Fiscal Committee. The bill also would require the State Department of Fish and Game prepare emergency fish rescue plans to prevent fish kills like the one that took place in 2007 on Prospect Island, in which thousands of fish died.

Volunteers ready to help save the fish stranded by levee repairs were forced to wait weeks while the state settled liability concerns and permit requests. Wolk's bill would mandate the creation of a network of such volunteers to help in an emergency.

* The Senate Appropriations Committee passed AB 2911, a bill that would treat inland oil spills like those along the coastline. It is meant to strengthen the prevention of and response to inland oil spills, boost oiled wildlife search and rescue efforts and increase enforcement and fines for polluters.

The governor announced his support for the bill in June.