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Land use has high priority, but slim chance of passage

DES MOINES (UPI)—Land use planning legislation—a concept designed to protect Iowa's prime agricultural land from commercial development—appears to be on everybody's list of legislative priorities this year, but chances of passage again appear slim.

Gov. Robert D. Ray has endorsed land use planning and both Democrats and Republicans are expected to include the issue on their separate lists of legislative priorities.

Although it is difficult to find a lawmaker who will argue against the concept, land use planning never has been

able to get by both houses of the Iowa Legislature. This year, proponents are only a little more optimistic of its chances, even with such widespread support.

The problem appears to be exactly how to accomplish the popular concept of saving Iowa's farmland. A House proposal this year, very similar to legislation approved two years ago by the lower chamber, would establish a state land use commission that would review local policy on land use plans to make sure it complies with state guidelines.

But opponents in the Senate say the bill gives far too much authority to the state

commission in overseeing local decisions.

Senate GOP leader Clavin Hultman of Red Oak said he has not yet seen a land use bill he could support and said he does not like the House proposal because it places too much emphasis at the state level.

"It would be much better to have a 'bottom-up' philosophy with emphasis on county and local control rather than at the state level," Hultman said in an interview.

He also does not like the establishment of "still another new government agency."

"It's difficult to be against land use per se, but there are different ways to approach this issue and I haven't decided

exactly which approach I favor," Hultman said.

Priebe, a farmer, also says he opposes the House bill because it gives too much authority to a state commission. He said, however, he would like to meet with members of the House Natural Resources Committee to try to work out a compromise.

"The kind of bill I would support would start the input at the bottom and feed up to the state level," said Priebe. "The state commission should only have a final say when two adjacent counties have plans that conflict."