

Parliament Mulls Expanding Eminent Domain Powers

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The State Duma is considering a bill that could severely restrict the rights of owners of land seized under eminent domain in areas annexed into Moscow last year, Vedomosti reported.

The new eminent domain powers echo the controversial procedures used in Sochi for expropriating land for the 2014 Winter Olympics. The Sochi measures have caused a major public backlash.

The bill was approved by the Cabinet and is sponsored by former top City Hall officials Vladimir Resin and Lyudmila Shvetsova.

The State Duma's Land and Construction Committee will consider the bill Jan. 17, and the lower house might pass it in the first reading, which is scheduled to occur between Jan. 22 and Jan. 25, said Martin Shakkum, first deputy chairman of the committee.

The bill seeks to set a six-month deadline for the expropriation of land. Currently, the procedure takes at least a year.

The legislation also empowers City Hall to manage federal land, file lawsuits related to such land and lease it out, said Sergei Kazinets, a partner at law firm Avelan.

In the bill, there is little protection for property rights, he said.

For instance, a land title can be canceled if the owner does not inform authorities about the title or if government officials fail to identify the owner, Kazinets added.

Even if such land is seized by mistake, the owner cannot get it back and may only claim damages, he said.

It will also be difficult to dispute government officials' appraisals of land value, Kazinets said.

Moreover, owners can receive a plot in exchange for land that is seized only if there are plots available, he said, adding that owners would have to "take what they're offered, otherwise they won't get anything."

The bill is likely to have a negative impact mostly on tenants and owners of small holdings, not people who hold large tracts, he said.

Meanwhile, a City Hall official said the city would try not to seize personal land.

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