

City of Missoula Lobbyist Report for Week of April 4

Quick Overview

Indications are that the Legislature could wrap up this week – possibly Thursday or Friday. The GOP-backed version of HB2 is done and will be on its way to the governor shortly. He is expected to veto it, which would mean a special session sometime in June for the specific purpose of agreeing on a budget. (The governor could request that other issues also be considered, but he must expressly include them or no other issues may be considered.) This week will be devoted largely to second- and third-reading action on the remaining bills that lawmakers want to move.

Committees Attended and Bills Testified:

Free Conference Committee: Attended multiple hearings of the Free Conference Committee on HB2. Final approval came on Thursday evening.

Senate Finance and Claims; HB 351: Treasure state endowment appropriations and transfers to the general fund. Attended to monitor, but did not testify. HB 7: Reclamation and development grants. Attended to monitor. HB 10: Long-range information technology appropriations. Attended to monitor. HB317: Sunset statutory appropriations over certain periods. Testified in opposition. HB439; General obligation bonds for state government. Testified in support. HB 495: Revise statutory appropriations and local government entitlement share payments. Testified in support. Bill passed. This was the least-costly and most fair of the different entitlement program bills. It freezes entitlements at existing rates for two years, then initiates a revamped payment schedule that more closely tracks actual economic conditions in the state to reduce the lag. Missoula County continued to oppose. The position of others is that this was the best compromise we could expect this session.

House Tax: SB 358: Generally revise tax increment financing districts. Attended to monitor. SB 265: Reduce property taxes on new construction for use of gray water systems. We opposed previously. Bill was amended to more than meet our concerns, but then amended again by House Tax to reinsert a provision. As it now stands, the bill does address the major concerns the city had, but it will create a financial hit for cities. The extent of that hit, however, may be fairly minimal.

Senate Judiciary: SB 193: Revise laws related to medical marijuana. HB 175: Submit repeal of Montana Medical Marijuana Act to voters of Montana. SB 193: Revise laws related to medical marijuana. Attended hearings on all three to monitor, but did not testify.

Senate Local Government: HB 560: Increase public involvement in urban renewal areas. HB 561: Revise terminology and criteria for factors in urban renewal districts. HB 562: Require notification of local governments and schools of urban renewal district. These are Elsie Arntzens' TIF bills. All passed. We've

taken a generally “neutral” position on all three at this point because they were heavily edited. We can’t support them, but the amendments generally address most of the concerns.

Other Direct Lobbying:

Spent a considerable amount of time during the week assisting in securing votes necessary to get the “bonding bill” passed. It includes \$29 million for the Missoula COT, as well as funding other educational projects, the state “heritage center” and a Veterans’ home in Butte. Concern arose over attempts to amend out certain projects – most notably money for the heritage center in Helena – and our efforts (in concert with UM’s lobbyist, ASUM’s lobbyist and lobbyists for the contractors, builders and others) was to push back on any amendments, which would stall the bill and most likely kill it. We worked closely with the bill’s sponsors – Carol Williams and Galen Hollenbaugh – and successfully talked amendment sponsors out of offering their proposals. This very important education and economic development bill needed to get two-thirds of both houses to pass. Democrats agreed to amend the funding trigger at which point the bonds could be issued from \$20 million to \$35 million. After a very long debate on the Senate floor, the bill passed with slightly more than the required two-thirds majority.

HB494: Subdivision for Rent or Lease. We’ve intentionally stepped back from this issue in recent weeks at it became more clear that this bill and HB629, the other being considered, both addressed the Missoula city issue in regard to zoning, and that the remaining concerns in both bills were largely county issues and they wanted to take the lead. However, efforts to reach a consensus on HB629 – and one lawmaker’s desire to table that bill – brought HB494 back to the surface as a preferred alternative. While the city is protected, counties seem to still be conflicted on this. Given that litigation is pending in Lewis and Clark County on this issue, we are not likely to see an attorney general’s opinion released. However, HB494 will not address issues the counties have with Subdivision for Rent or Lease, and this bill could face a veto from the governor.

Spent several mornings in Joint Appropriations meeting listening to discussion regarding various aspects of state funding.

Senate Local Government, SB 240: Revise laws related to street lighting improvement districts. Attended but did not testify.

House State Administration, HB 350: Revise expiration of state contracts. Testified in opposition.

Senate Business and Labor, SB 259: Require impoundment of license plates if driver is uninsured. Testified in opposition.

House Judiciary, HB 332: Restore the right of a fully informed jury. Attended but did not testify.

Senate Taxation, SB 265: Reduce property taxes on new construction for use of gray water systems.

Arrived too late to testify in opposition, but met with Sen. Erickson and Kaufman after and expressed city's opposition.

Senate Local Government, SB 234: Generally revise municipal solid waste services and SB 236, Revise solid waste laws related to local government. Attended but did not testify.

House Agriculture, HB 407: Define potentially dangerous and dangerous dog, provide exemptions, penalties. Testified as informational. Sought minor changes at Jim Carlson's request.

Senate Judiciary, SB 154: Regulating medical marijuana provider supply system. Attended but did not testify.

House Human Services, HB 429: Revise procedures related to the Medical Marijuana Act. Attended but did not testify.

Other Direct Lobbying

Extensive work during the week regarding HB304, the special district legislation. Met individually with all members of the Missoula delegation who serve on the House Local Government Committee and provided additional written material and background on the issue. Worked with Harold Blattie on proposed amendments in case the bill appears to be moving forward.

Continued efforts regarding the Subdivision for Rent or Lease issue. Builders provided their proposed language which has been reviewed by the OPG and is being discussed. The Realtors are proposing their own language and I visited with Rep. Reinhart about any further bills – possibly a committee bill – that might still be in the works, including some draft language from the Planners. We are down to the wire on this one and I'm not sure where we will end up.

Met a number of times with the Realtors lobbyist to discuss expected language on the Esp bill on subdivisions that we are anticipating. They've agreed to accept Missoula's language on the waiting period – including a provision that the governing body must "schedule and hold" the element review meeting within 10 days of the request. However, the bill will include language to change the "ag impact" standard, and language attempting to require that agency officials not testify on matters or provide information not backed up by "science."

Continuing efforts to persuade carrier of HB516 to not move forward with her bill. She picked it up on Friday and dropped it off almost immediately, so it has been referred to House Judiciary, where she sits. The hearing has not yet been scheduled.

Other Activities

None.