

WEEKLY REPORT
Missoula
Week Ending 3-26-2021

WEEK IN REVIEW

HB259: Revise property and zoning laws.

Position: OPPOSE

Status: PASSED third reading in Senate 31-19 on 3/26. Returned to the House.

Despite our efforts and work with a good variety of allies, this bill – which we originally believed we had tabled in House Local Government – passed its final legislative hurdle on Friday with a 31-19 partly-line vote in the Senate. This bill obviously became a “leadership” bill during this session and we were up against both the super majority in the Legislature as well as the governor’s office.

HB319: Revise dates for special purpose elections

Position: SUPPORT

Status: TABLED in Senate State Admin.

We are hoping to revive this bill after talks with Sen. Bennett, who opposed it and led efforts to kill it. We’d talked with Bennett before the bill was introduced and were confident concerns he’d initially raised had been addressed. He told us, however, that he doesn’t like creating “exceptions” to the rule. Bozeman officials have reached out to him and he is somewhat open to allowing reconsideration of the bill in committee.

HB639: Revise laws related to adoption of a tax increment provision

Position: OPPOSE

Status: TABLED in House Tax committee 3/26. A great win. This was a terrible TIF bill that would have had the largest impact on smaller, less diversified towns trying to general economic development through TIF. It also would have been a disincentive as it penalized TIF success by limiting the ability to do more in different parts of a larger town or city. We had a strong strategy against this one, led by the League and with good testimony from our clients, businesses and smaller communities to help put this one to bed.

HB269: Require elected official approval of sanitation related to local health boards.

Position: OPPOSE

Status: TABLED in Senate Local Government 3/26.

Finally got some traction to defeat this bill, one of many efforts in the Legislature this year to limit local government health board authority, this one specific to wastewater treatment and control.

SB178: Prohibiting state building codes from requiring mandatory fire sprinklers.

Position: OPPOSE

Status: PASSED House on third-reading and sent to enrolling.

Fire departments from both Missoula and Bozeman opposed this and we worked it to some extent in the halls, but it passed.

HB243: Revise laws related to law enforcement officers.

Position: SUPPORT

Status: PASSED Senate and returned to House for enrolling.

This is Missoula's bill allowing reserve officers to serve as court security officers. It received unanimous approval on both the House and Senate floors.

SB388: Provide for infrastructure through tax increment financing

Position: OPPOSE

Status: Hearing held 3/26 in Senate Local Government

For Missoula and Bozeman Chris Behan and Brit Fontenot testified along with opponents from the League, schools, DA Davidson and others. The sponsor said after that the bill was NOT intended to apply to TIFs but that is not really the point. We will continue to monitor and oppose.

NEW BILLS OF INTEREST OR CONCERN

SB397: Generally revise laws related to accessory dwelling units.

Position: OPPOSE/MONITOR

Status: The bill was introduced on 3/25 and caught all of us off guard. We discussed with Missoula, Bozeman and the League, as well as with the sponsor who had inquired whether Missoula, specifically, would support the bill. Because it would limit local authority, we can't support.

STATUS OF OTHER ISSUES AND BILLS

HB427: Provide for youth health protection

Position: OPPOSE

Status: Passed Senate Judiciary on a party line vote and is headed to the Senate floor. We expect floor action next week.

HB112; Require interscholastic athletes to participate under sex assigned at birth.

Position: OPPOSE

Status: Passed Senate Judiciary on a party line vote and is headed to the Senate floor. We expect floor action next week.

HB436: Generally revise firearms laws

Position: OPPOSE

Status: Heard in Senate Judiciary. This bill would eliminate the ability of local governments to regulate the carrying of unpermitted, concealed weapons in government buildings. The committee chair has indicated he is not in a hurry to vote on this bill.

HB504: Generally revise firearms laws.

Position: OPPOSE

Status: Passed Senate Judiciary on 3/19 on a party line vote. Awaiting Senate floor vote.

SB215: Establish the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Position: OPPOSE

Status: Passed House Judiciary 3/19 on party line vote. Awaiting floor vote in the House.

NEXT WEEK:

As noted above, we expect executive action on two of the negative transgender bills, the RFRA bill and two bills limiting local government ability to regulate firearms.

Also, we continue to closely monitor subcommittee work regarding the ARPA money that is coming to Montana.

We also continue to help the league with:

SB358: Repeal numeric nutrient standards for water quality

Position: SUPPORT

We continue to assist the league on this after we were able to revive it from committee. We coordinated efforts to get input from clients on the amendments that have been offered by the DEQ. This bill continues to be a work in progress and is scheduled for a hearing later this month.

HB121: Require elected official approval of local health board and officer actions.

Of the many bills attempting to limit the ability of local health boards, this is the one we've determined we can work with and hopefully help support and move forward. As of late this week, however, there were indications that we may have issues developing.