

Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce 2014 LEGISLATIVE & POLICY PRIORITIES

The Chamber has prepared this list of legislative and policy priorities to inform our membership about our advocacy on their behalf and to engage them in a dialogue about their concerns and challenges. We welcome your comments on these and other issues affecting your ability to do business.

Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP)

HDIP was developed by the Patrick-Murray administration to provide state and local tax relief for rehabilitation projects, within a designated zone, to encourage construction of market rate housing. The Chamber advocated for the Worcester City Council to create an HDIP zone in the city which has recently received state approval. The Chamber stands ready to assist in marketing this new economic development opportunity to the developer community.

DCU Center Expansion / BCEC Legislation

The first two expansion phases at the DCU Center have been completed and include interior upgrades and a new façade, main entrance, and new digital marquee. Phase III would complete the planned expansion. The Chamber is working to secure additional capital for the final phase through already pending legislation that would fund expansion of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. In coordination with our legislative delegation, the Chamber aims to secure funding for the DCU Center through this legislation.

Commercial Corridor Overlay District

The Chamber is monitoring the progress of the Commercial Corridor Overlay District proposal put forth by the City of Worcester. This new overlay district seeks to increase economic activity by promoting a more pedestrian friendly approach to development in the downtown and commercial corridors. The Chamber has testified before the Planning Board to highlight concerns regarding the impact that certain components of the proposal might have on their neighborhood. However, the overlay district is viewed by most as having a positive impact on continued development and growth.

EPA Mandates

The Chamber continues to press the issue of unfunded EPA mandates related to the Upper Blackstone Wastewater Treatment Facility and EPA water quality permits. These unfunded mandates result in costs that are passed directly to businesses and residents in higher water and sewer rates. The escalating costs of water and sewer present another hurdle to creating a vibrant community for both businesses and residents. The Chamber is in communication with our federal delegation to seek relief from the EPA, either in terms of the updates required or the length of time by which those updates must be completed.

continued



Tax Classification

Worcester's dual tax rate (also known as tax classification) is an ongoing priority for the Chamber and our member businesses. While we have made progress in recent years, the dual tax rate is still an obstacle to development in the city. The cost of doing business in Worcester is, in many cases, dramatically higher than in single rate communities. With competition fierce and a single tax rate in most bordering communities, development has been slowed as a result of the dual rate.

The Chamber will continue this conversation throughout the year to build momentum and capitalize on progress made over the past three years.

Legislation and Ballot Initiatives

We also continue to monitor the progress of legislation and ballot initiatives on the issues of:

1. Minimum Wage
2. Paid Sick Days
3. Unemployment Insurance Rates
4. Expansion of the Bottle Bill

If passed, these initiatives could have a negative impact on the economic vibrancy of our membership, create further disincentives for development, and may put the Commonwealth at a greater competitive disadvantage in a global economy.

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