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The Weekly Recap

WHAT HAPPENED: It was, by comparison, a much quieter week for the General Assembly. The expected lull came in the wake of the previous week's clamor, which saw gusts of legislative activity under the wire of the "crossover" deadline that determined which bills remain eligible for the remainder of the session. But we still have bills to discuss in the Bulletin below.

WHAT IT MEANS: With crossover behind us, it's a good time to reflect Much of the general political discourse this week has reflected upon votes from crossover week, notable the abortion legislation the General Assembly approved and sent Gov. Roy Cooper, who plans to veto the bill, which would send it back to the legislative chambers, whose members could override the veto and put the bill into law.

ON TAP: We expect next week to be a lot quieter by comparison, but minds do expect the Senate to issue its budget proposal at some point after that, potentially the week of May 15. That would leave the chambers six weeks to hammer out a compromise budget before the start of the new fiscal year. Much of the policy issues that legislative leaders have said they wanted to tackle this session have been considered at this point, so the schedule isn't unreasonable. But one piece of older business might resurface for lawmakers before the session is over -- redistricting, following the N.C. Supreme Court decision that came out this past Friday opining that partisan gerrymandering isn't subject to review by our state courts. This means legislators may be expected to redraw the maps this session.

THE SKINNY: The crossover flurry was big from almost every angle. We have tracked and reported below on bill activity that stood out during this very busy week.

Midpoint Legislative Update

In case you missed it on Thursday, what follows is a synopsis of an update from NCLM Director of Government Affairs Erin Wynia regarding where key legislation stands following the passing of the key legislative crossover deadline on May 4.

In short, the representatives of member cities and towns should feel encouraged about their efforts, including on SB 317/HB 562 Addressing the Workforce Housing Crisis, which failed to move ahead of the crossover deadline. That the state budget plan approved by the House continues to heavily invest in infrastructure is another positive for municipalities.

Still, there are months to go in this legislative session. Our team has flagged a few pieces of legislation that appear likely to move ahead and need your advocacy to ensure a good result for cities. Now is the time to focus.

Here are three key pieces of legislation that require communication with legislators and action. We've included links to talking points documents that will assist you in those communications:

- HB 409 Regulation of Accessory Dwelling Units would preempt local zoning in every community statewide by allowing a second residence to be built on any lot zoned for single-family homes, with very few restrictions. Having passed the House, it is now poised for passage in the Senate without your efforts to inform senators about how it would change neighborhoods all across your city. A fact sheet with talking points can be found here.

- SB 675 Land Use Changes and Clarifications would eliminate all extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) in the state, damaging the ability to ensure that compatible growth takes place and even slowing development in some areas. Draw upon these talking points and point to specific concerns in your town in your conversations with legislators.

- HB 140 Civilian Traffic Investigators/Pilot would allow select cities to use civilian traffic investigators to respond to traffic accidents, a change that would allow them to more effectively use sworn officers to deter and respond to crime and address critical labor shortages in public safety. Unfortunately, the legislation was amended to apply to only four cities after earlier applying statewide. Let your legislators know the importance of this bill's passage but also why it should be changed to apply statewide. These talking points give you more background.

As we've already seen this legislative session, the voices of city officials change outcomes. And with your continued conversations in the coming weeks, more positive results will come. You can find a full rundown of significant legislation affecting cities and towns here. Also, please let Erin, at ewynia@nclm.org, or any of our Government Affairs staff members, know how your discussions with legislators go. Your feedback helps us do better, too.

Legislative Committee Interest Forms Now Available

Newly elected NC League of Municipalities President William Harris seeks to appoint interested city officials as new members of the NCLM Legislative Policy Committee, and you may sign up now.

The Legislative Policy Committee is an internal group of city officials that forms policy positions on key issues for North Carolina cities. Committee members also serve as advocates on municipal legislation and are an integral part of the League. If you are interested in serving on this committee, please fill out this form no later than May 26.

Please direct questions to Grassroots Associate Abbie Britt at abritt@nclm.org.

NCLM Intervenes in Lighting Rate Case

The League of Municipalities moved to minimize a proposed Duke Energy Progress municipal lighting rate increase this week by presenting a counteroffer during rate case negotiations. The League intervened in the case in March on behalf of cities in the Duke Energy Progress territory, which covers electrical services to a significant portion of eastern North Carolina as well as some areas in western NC. The utility's proposed increase would include a three-year multi-rate plan to raise the rates for lighting class customers by slightly more than 30 percent. Duke Energy Progress stated that this increase was necessary to cover the costs of infrastructure improvements, grid modernization, and clean energy initiatives. The North Carolina Utilities Commission is currently hearing testimony about the proposal and will decide on rate increases in the upcoming months.

During a Utilities Commission hearing this week, the League actively participated by presenting testimony from mayors Bill Saffo of Wilmington and Terry Mann of Whiteville. Additionally, the League's counsel cross-examined several Duke Energy Progress witnesses and continues to negotiate on behalf of cities to safeguard their budgets and enable them to continue providing essential services to citizens. It is likely that any rate increases approved by the Commission in this case will carry over to expected future increases for municipal customers in the utility's other division, Duke Energy Carolinas, which covers most of the remainder of the state.

Register for 'Closing the Digital Divide'

The N.C. Department of Information Technology Division of Broadband and Digital Equity, North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, North Carolina League of Municipalities, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration invite you to Closing the Digital Divide: Internet for All in NC in Raleigh.

This daylong event, May 23 in Raleigh, will bring together critical stakeholders in North Carolina from the federal, state, tribal, and local governments, industry, and other key collaborators to discuss coordination on broadband efforts as the state prepares to receive significant broadband funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Connecting all people in North Carolina to affordable, reliable high-speed internet is critical to our economic prosperity and this event will provide an opportunity for us to discuss ways we can work together to efficiently and effectively utilize these federal dollars to the maximum extent. An agenda will be provided prior to the event.

Full details on the event's website.

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