

Fredrikson and Byron Legislative Update



MAT STATE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

May 10, 2020

Happy Mother's Day! It's amazing how things have taken a sudden and dramatic turn! Because of COVID, the past two months have been a blur and it has greatly affected everyone's ability – including MAT - to accomplish original legislative session goals.

The typical end of a legislative session has been upended in a drastic way: no committee deadlines, no budget targets, no in-person hearings, and a \$1.5 billion state budget *surplus* has now quickly turned into a \$2.4 billion budget *deficit*!

The legislature and Governor have approved a little more than \$551 million in COVID relief. Complicating matters, however, is that state governments across the country have not received complete guidance from the federal government on how and what COVID relief funds can be spent.

For that reason, the Governor and four caucus leaders (Gazelka, Kent, Hortman and Daudt) have agreed that no legislation or budget items can go forward unless there is agreement by the five of them and that funding doesn't come from the state's General Fund. Anything of controversy with opposition has been halted. So that leaves a few major items including:

- A bonding bill;
- COVID relief bills (eg; economic development, elections, workers compensation, etc.); and
- Broadband funding.

With 10 days left in the legislative session, what does this mean for MAT initiatives? Here's a quick list of those issues, the details and MAT's involvement:

- Transportation – MAT is actively working behind the scenes with legislators for funding to be included in the bonding bill to help upgrade town roads to 10-ton capacity.
- Broadband Funding – MAT was part of a Broadband coalition which helped both the House and Senate pass their respective broadband bills. A few minor details still need to be worked out. Both bills provide \$20 million in three ways.
 - \$10 million for the Border-to-Border Broadband program;
 - \$8 million for distance learning grants to school districts and charter schools;
 - \$2 million for telemedicine equipment reimbursements.
 - Prior to July 1, 2021, the funds may only be used in unserved areas of the state, while after that date, the funds may also be used in underserved areas.

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- Elections – MAT lobbied behind the scenes on both elections bills which have now passed both the House and Senate. A few final details need to be worked out. Both bills include the following:
 - More than \$17 million for security purposes and to also address 2020 elections related to COVID-19;
 - Maintains local control over 2020 elections (**mandated mail-in balloting was removed**, but required social distancing accommodations must be made for in-person voting);
 - Roughly half of the funds can be used for any COVID-19 related needs such as temporary screens, cleaning and sanitizing supplies, protective equipment, and social distancing compliance, including extra staff to manage an expected increase of mail absentee ballots;
 - The other half of funding can be used for more general election needs, including updating the Statewide Voter Registration System, election accessibility, and improved election security; and
 - The bill also allows for the one-time relocation of polling places by July 1, 2020, to protect vulnerable populations and electronic filing of an affidavit of candidacy and electronic signatures for nominations petitions.
- Workers' Compensation – Legislation has passed allowing for workers' compensation claims to be made by emergency responders (and others like child care workers serving emergency responder families) who get COVID on the job. To avoid large cost burdens on local government (eg; towns, counties, cities), MAT has helped organize a coalition of local governments and self-insured entities to successfully negotiate with the insurance and business sectors. Final details on the legislation are being put together to pass this week.

As for the remainder of MAT legislative priorities, they are no longer viable this legislative session because of the COVID crisis and lack of funds including:

- Annexation
- Local Government Aid for townships
- Allowing local government to issue street assessment fees on development
- Requiring private property owners to pay replacement costs for flooded out culverts (instead of townships)
- Allowing towns to lower speed limits from 55 mph to 30 mph
- Advancing legislation to encourage more volunteer drivers for local, non-profit services.

On the bright side, COVID has also stopped legislation that MAT was actively fighting including:

- Truck Weight Exemptions – blocking additional truck weight exemption bills from passing out of committee and beyond
- Mandated government audio recording and storage of all local government meetings.

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Finally, in the final week of the legislative session, we should see a few more announcements on legislative retirements. Recently, Rep. Laurie Halverson from Eagan became the latest state legislator to announce her retirement from the state legislature as she has decided to run for her local county board. There have also been a couple of party endorsement upsets which may lead to a few more announced retirements. To see who else has already announced that they're not running for re-election, go to: <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/history/retire>