

## **White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Policy**

**DRAFT 2 08.12.08– For internal purposes only. Ready for presentation to the BOD.**

The Chamber provides a legislative voice by hosting events and passing on information concerning legislative issues through the Government Affairs Committee, the Chamber Newsletter and through special mailings, e-mails and faxes during the legislative session. Local issues are addressed through continued direct contact with City officials, Council meetings, Business Day at the Capitol, etc.

The White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce policy and advocacy agenda will reflect the concerns and priorities of the business community. We encourage our members to become involved in the Government Affairs Committee to impact the policymaking in our region and state.

We understand that we will not always have 100% agreement among our members on our policy and advocacy agenda. For this reason, feedback from our members is not only requested but is necessary to keep these statements a true reflection of the views of our business community.

### **Transportation**

The White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce (WBACC) believes a continued investment in transportation systems allow for the reliable movement of people and goods, and enhance the economic competitiveness and quality of life for the region. The WBACC advocates for an appropriate and efficient transportation system. The WBACC supports:

- Providing adequate capacity and effective management to reduce traffic congestion.
- Opposing tying transportation funding to non-transportation issues.
- Efforts to increase the speed of construction planning and completion.
- Urging the legislature to enact a plan to fund unmet transportation needs, including the consideration of new funding mechanisms.
- Public transportation as an important system component and should be implemented as cost effectively as possible.

### **Public Safety**

On the issue of public safety the WBACC believes our elected leaders must improve the public safety of our region with a concentrated effort. It is an issue that can greatly impact the economic development of our region. The WBACC recognizes that these challenges are difficult and not subject to quick fix approaches. The WBACC supports efforts that:

- Secure federal funding for emergency preparedness;
- Address livability crimes and prevent neighborhood degradation;

- Coordinate efforts between jurisdiction and government agencies; and
- Forge public-private partnerships that explore policy initiatives designed to improve public safety across the region.

### **Economic Development**

The WBACC supports economic development proposals that generate additional commerce and tourism for the state and White Bear Lake area and surrounding communities, or enhances the region's attractiveness to potential employers and employees. The WBACC supports programs that support the growth and development of small business in our region.

The WBACC advocates economic development and redevelopment as a vital component of the health of our community through the creation of jobs and increases in the tax base. The WBACC supports:

- Any legal business attempting to locate in an appropriately zoned commercial/industrial area and submitting a proposal that conforms with all regulatory requirements.
- The rights of any business to apply for zoning changes.
- Economic development efforts of both members and non-members.
- All businesses in their economic development efforts even if that business competes with a current member.
- The use of financial tools where development/redevelopment would not occur but for the assistance provided.
- Efforts to improve transportation options and infrastructure.
- Will be actively involved on any policy development that impacts a business such as: sign ordinances, taxes, transportation, etc.

### **Energy**

Businesses are concerned about the increasing costs and dependability of energy sources. The WBACC believes that reliable and affordable energy, in particular electricity, is important to all Minnesota businesses regardless of industry, size, or location. Minnesota must diversify its energy portfolio, take advantage of emerging technologies and natural resources, and encourage energy conservation in order to remain competitive. The WBACC supports:

- Increase electricity generation from multiple sources, technologies and processes;
- Engage businesses in conservation efforts, including tax incentives for cost-effective technologies;
- Encourage the exploration of alternative energy technologies; and
- Assures Minnesota remains competitive through equitable taxes for energy suppliers and energy generation.

- Supports evaluation of conservation programs weighing the cost of the measure against the cost of production and transmission of the energy use they would save. Peak period energy is the most cost-effective to conserve.
- Supports the creation of renewable energy through incentives rather than mandates.
- Supports elimination of any government imposed costs that raise the cost of generating electricity in Minnesota.
- Supports all types of generation (including hydroelectric and nuclear) for adding to base load generating capacity.

### **Health Care**

The WBACC believes state actions and policies should support the goal of increased access to health insurance for our state's uninsured. The Chamber of Commerce believes that policy changes must be made to reduce the impact of health care mandates, taxes, and regulations on the cost of health care. Additionally, we support creation of a functioning, responsive health care marketplace that will achieve better health outcomes, reduce the cost of health care, and reduce the rate of future health care cost increases. The WBACC supports policies that:

- Encourage patients to receive greater information concerning quality of care standards;
- Create better transparency in pricing, costs and quality for the individual service and full episode of care;
- Provide additional health care purchasing opportunities for smaller businesses, for example, membership organizations should have the ability to negotiate healthcare coverage for their members ;
- Promote good public health and wellness practices as means of controlling costs; and Establish public-private partnerships to create innovative solutions to health care problems.

### **Taxation**

Tax policy can greatly impact the business and consumer climate in our region. Taxes on corporate income, property and business activities are extremely important to the business community. Therefore, the WBACC:

- Opposes tax increases to simply generate more revenue for government spending;
- Opposes any shifts in the property tax burden for commercial and industrial property owners;
- Supports efforts to maximize efficiencies and effectiveness of government agencies and programs;
- Supports assessing levies against market value instead of tax capacity.

- Supports efforts to move Minnesota out of the top ten states in state taxes per capita.
- Will be actively involved on any policy development that includes a "user fee."
- Opposes general franchise fees that are imposed on all properties or citizens without regard for specific benefit.
- Supports the utilization of reserve funds where appropriate. The reserve funds should be fully transparent to the public, used as defined and spent or set aside within the planned timeframe. All additions to the reserve fund should cease once the target amount is reached.

### **Workforce Development**

Workforce development is one of the most important challenges facing employers today. Demographic studies suggest current workforce shortages to be long-term and employers are concerned with worker preparedness. The WBACC recognizes the health of our business climate is greatly impacted by the availability of a quality workforce. Therefore, the Chamber supports efforts to keep our businesses competitive with a system that produces a flexible, skilled workforce. Therefore the WBACC supports:

- Programs that provide workforce readiness and real-world training to high school students;
- Skills training programs that target under-skilled job seekers and provide career advancement opportunities;
- Systems within higher education that are responsive to employer workforce needs across all industries; and International workers that can meet workforce demands and sanctions on employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers.
- Strategies that utilize business leadership to guide the use of available public and private resources for workforce development.
- Improving relevant information tools and preparation activities for youth to make successful transitions into the workforce.
- Collaboration between businesses, secondary schools, high schools, community and technical colleges, apprenticeships and other educational and training programs to provide high quality workforce education and training experiences.
- Strategies to improve availability of information about career and training opportunities to those seeking employment.
- Strategies to create measurements for success against workforce development goals at the regional and local level.

### **Education**

The Chamber of Commerce believes that strong local schools and a strong business community are vital to each other and our community. The WBACC:

- Believes that strong leadership in our schools and business community will promote a strong community.
- Supports local public school accountability for continuous improvements in academic achievement for all students.
- Supports fiscally responsible local school funding at the state and federal level.
- Supports reforming and modernizing teacher compensation (e.g. performance pay) to ensure the most competent teachers in our classrooms.
- Supports continued efforts to increase local control of public education.

### **Environment**

The WBACC is committed to working in partnership with policymakers to ensure environmental policies are advanced based on sound scientific data and on overall economic benefit. The WBACC supports:

- Partnerships in the public-private sector that address environmental concerns and lead to innovative approaches;
- Processes that will identify, evaluate and restore impaired waters, but also assures business growth is not prevented;
- Policies that respect the rights of private property owners and encourages redevelopment; and permitting processes that are clear and concise so reliable guidelines are understood when expansion is considered.

### **Endorsements of Federal Candidates**

The Federal Election Campaign Act allows membership organizations like the Chamber to advocate the election or defeat of a federal candidate as long as that direct advocacy takes place with the Chamber's members, staff and families only.

We are allowed to communicate to our members, staff and families through the members-only portion of our website (e.g. post completed campaign questionnaires, links to the campaign website) articles in the monthly newsletter, email and regular mail to our members, "podium time" at a chamber event, meet and greet events, encouragement of our members to volunteer and/or host fundraising events, phone banks for voter registration and/or get out the vote activities.

Without having our own federal PAC, we cannot make direct contributions, make direct or indirect payments of gifts of money, services or anything of value to any federal candidate (except for certain types of communications with members).

Chamber leadership feels it's important for the Chamber to show leadership at the federal level if: there is a clear philosophical difference between the candidates on business issues; the candidate understands and supports the Chamber position on key issues such as taxes, business climate, job growth, health care and transportation; the candidate is electable; and the candidate has a history of getting things done for the Chamber's service area. Our involvement will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Additional criteria for endorsement:

Does the candidate have local business community support?

Does the candidate have pro-business positions on Chamber issues?

Voting record (Incumbents only)

Leadership on key issues