

# Home Builders Association of Greater Springfield Government 2023 Affairs Recap

by: Miles Ross, HBA Government Affairs Specialist

2023 was a busy but productive year for your local HBA Governmental Affairs team. We worked with many partners and members to protect your business from unwanted legislation and ordinances.

Each year, we track all bills that are proposed in the Missouri General Assembly. A number of bad bills get proposed many years in a row, like a bill to require roofing contractors to have a state license or require fireplace installers to have a mechanical license. These were bad pieces of legislation that could have had crippling effects on business in these industries. We also advocate for good legislation like worker training programs, legislation strengthening contracts, or fixing workers comp laws.

With several thousand bills being proposed in Jefferson City each year, we work closely with other HBAs across the state to make sure nothing slips through that would adversely affect our members. We have conference calls every other week where we discuss legislation and the actions that we need to take. If a piece of legislation that is damaging to the industry looks like it is gaining traction, we enlist your help to reach out to lawmakers, giving them more than one voice that they are hearing from.

Locally, we meet with elected officials and staff in all the surrounding municipalities on a regular basis to make sure that we have good relationships with that municipality. We want them to see the HBA as a resource when it comes to residential building, and not as an opponent. That is important because it helps us have conversations about different ordinances being proposed in each municipality.

Last year, we worked closely with Greene County as they sought to update their building codes. Special interest groups sought to influence the codes in a very restrictive manner, potentially increasing the cost of new homes by thousands. Our relationship with Greene County helped us fight back against inaccurate information—ultimately saving home buyers thousands.

The City of Springfield also had code changes that we worked diligently on to try and mitigate any negative impact the original proposals would have had. In that case, a special interest group that is against building had a few allies on city council. We went to meetings with the BDS staff, attended City Council meetings, and prepared information to stop some radical ideas that would have made housing unaffordable for many looking to buy a home.

We constantly work with lawmakers in the Missouri General Assembly and your local elected officials to head off anything that will have a negative effect on your business. If you see a bill or ordinance that could affect your business, please reach out and let us know so we can help.

## City of Republic

I met with Andrew Nelson, the Republic Deputy City Administrator, to discuss some serious complaints about the BDS department and specifically overzealous inspectors. Andrew perceived what the meeting was about and proactively had discussions with the entire BDS team about those issues. He also gave his personal cell number to one of our builders and told them to call him if they failed a final inspection

for small things that could be easily fixed. I have followed up with some of our builders, and it seems things are better.

This is great news for us as he promised if we have any problems, we can call him on his cell phone, and he will immediately get on it. We have had a few complaints about the City of Republic, but I hope this move continues to straighten them out.

### **City of Springfield**

Councilman Brandon Jensen spoke to our Advocacy Committee and went through his draft nuisance property ordinance. He has done an excellent job trying to get everyone's input and addressing any concerns. The Committee voted unanimously to support the ordinance but NOT endorse it. Although, the ordinance, as currently written, doesn't do much more than gather data. The committee and staff were worried about any amendments that might come about during the legislative process. We have had multiple conversations with members of council, the Realtors, and other allied partners, making sure this is the right step.

### **HBA Code meeting**

The HBA hosted a forum with code officials that included Greene County, Christian County, and the City of Springfield. I spent a lot of time working on getting officials there because it was after hours. There were a lot of follow-up calls and back and forth with some of our communities trying to get representatives there.

Overall, the meeting was helpful in keeping our relationships with those officials in good order. They appreciated being invited even though it was after hours for them. There was some good information shared, but we could have probably used more member questions to get more detailed information to the audience. Laurie and Chelsey sent thank you cards as a follow up, which confused some of the code officials—because they had never received a thank you card before.

### **State of Missouri**

I have reported that there was a group of Realtors and architects who were looking to pass statewide building codes. That effort is now over with. I worked with Jeff Kester at Springfield Realtors, and he was able to help us get it stopped!

### **The General Assembly**

They had their constitutionally mandated Veto Session on September 13th. Nothing really happened other than a ton of fundraisers. The General Assembly did not override any of the Governor's veto's.

August 28 was the day bills that passed in this year's legislative session became law. Nothing passed that directly impacted residential home construction. There are some things like funding for MODOT to rebuild I-70 completely and preliminary work on fixing I-44 that will eventually have an indirect impact.

Please be aware that it is now illegal to hold or support a cell phone in any way while driving. You can talk by using Bluetooth or headphones, but that is it. Fines start at \$150 and can go up to \$500 on the third offense. There IS a grace period until January 1, 2025, but you can still get a warning.

## Greene County

The Advocacy Committee and PAC voted to support Rusty MacLachlan for his reelection effort. They voted to give him a check for \$1,000 this early to help Rusty try and scare away any possible challengers. I also attended a fundraiser for Rusty, representing the HBA.

Both Associate Commissioners are up for reelection this cycle (2024), and the Presiding Commissioner is up in 2026.

We are also still waiting for Greene County to pass their updated codes. They have had some staff out with illness this summer and aren't in much of a hurry to get it done. It should happen by December, though.

Building permits for new residential construction are up over last year (August). 312 permits have been issued in 2023 versus 282 over the same time in 2022.

## Ozark

Laurie and I met with the Ozark City Administrator, Steve Childers, and had a very good meeting with him. It was a good opportunity for Laurie and Steve to meet and put a name with the face. We discussed new changes the City of Ozark is putting on subdivision developments. This is something we have worked on with the City for a few years now. Originally, they were going to go way overboard with too many requirements, required amenities, and aesthetics. We are waiting on a draft of the proposal when it is ready and will share it with anyone interested.

Ozark considered new proposals for subdivisions that would require one pool for every 76 houses in any new subdivision, among other things. I spoke to our development members and builders many times getting information to try and push back against this. I also spoke to NAHB several times. Interestingly, NAHB has never heard of anything like this. Laurie, JJ, and I went to the first Board of Alderman meeting and raised concerns. Even though our points seemed well received, they are still pushing ahead. The issue was tabled at the meeting last week due to some requirements. It is most likely they will pass this, but the City has invited us to a meeting to be held in December for further discussion on this topic.

## Missouri Attorney General

I met with Andrew Bailey the MO AG about some other things, but we did discuss his office's legal actions against WOTUS (waterways of the us) and the continued lawsuits that are trying to prevent it from ever happening. This was the Obama-era EPA ruling that would have turned almost any body of water (think of a puddle during heavy rain that goes into a creek) regulated by the state and federal government. The NAHB spent over \$1 million fighting it a few years ago.



Miles Ross founded Veritas Public Relations in 2011 and began working with the HBA in the role of Government Affairs Specialist in 2013. Miles works closely with area municipalities and the state legislature, monitoring building code changes and legislation that affects the building industry.

Phone: 417.881.3711 | Email: [miles@veritaspublishing.com](mailto:miles@veritaspublishing.com)