

**GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

**June 8, 2005
8:30 a.m.**

40 Pearl St. NW Ste. 410
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

MINUTES

1. Call To Order

The meeting was called to order at 8:35 by Chairman Ted Vonk.

Present:

Marta Brecting	Alpine Township
Jim Beelen	Allendale Township
Jim Day	Kent County
Mike DeVries	Grand Rapids Township
Don Hilton	Gaines Township
Gayle McCrath	Grand Valley Metro Council
Debra Nier	City of Wayland
Steven Patrick	City of Coopersville
Rick Root	City of Kentwood
Don Stypula	Grand Valley Metro Council
Ted Vonk	Kent County
Bill Wiersma	Tallmadge Township

2. Approval of Minutes

MOTION - To approve the minutes of the May, 2005, GVMC Legislative Committee meeting. MOVE – Root. SUPPORT – Hilton. MOTION CARRIED.

3. Update on State Budget, Revenue Sharing and Other Issues in Lansing

Don Stypula called Arnold Weinfeld of the MML and asked him to comment on current issues in Lansing.

Mr. Weinfeld stated the House and Senate have been using two different methods in the budget process. The House has been using POG and passed one large omnibus bill, and the Senate is using the traditional method of budgeting. The Senate was talking about a \$22.4 million cut in revenue sharing a couple of weeks ago. It looks as if revenue sharing will be held to the same amount it was last year. The constitutional portion has dropped,

but it will be made up with additional statutory. Senate is backing off its proposed cut. In addition to preservation of revenue sharing, HB 4831 adds \$3.7 million in additional funds for fire grants to local communities with state facilities, bringing the total to over \$10 million; maintains staffing levels and funding for the fire investigation unit in the Department of State Police; and retains the Dam Safety program in the Department of Environmental Quality. We are also watching closely cuts to various programs including Amtrak, the People Mover in Detroit, and the Newberry prison in the U.P. in both the House and Senate budgets. K-12 budget has been increased by \$75 per pupil.

Rick Root asked how close a call with the bill be.

Mr. Weinfeld stated it will be a straight party line vote and it will need to be reconciled in conference committee. It will have to be a bipartisan compromise.

Don Stypula asked if the governor is talking to the leadership?

Mr. Weinfeld replied that there is less division than what is being reported in the media.

Ted Vonk asked about the business tax debate?

Mr. Weinfeld stated that Senator Sikkema will be holding hearings on the Governor's plan. He believes the current system is better and said there are other options.

The House is being more aggressive and says it is putting four or five different models together. It is not probable there will be any changes to the business tax until fall.

Don Hilton asked where SB 522 is at.

Mr. Weinfeld stated Senators are frustrated with the current system. They have bought the Wolverine pipeline media. We don't like it, however it will let locals have a say. If they say no, it could go to arbitration.

Don Hilton stated by doing that, they are doing an end run around the Supreme Court.

Mr. Weinfeld stated yes. Big Business went to the legislature to change the law.

Mr. Weinfeld stated they are also still working on the sewer bond issue and are hoping to start discussions on how to fix the municipal finance issue.

Don Stypula stated GVMC has not yet taken a position on SB522. Would the committee like to take a position?

Don Hilton stated the MTA and MML were in agreement on opposing the issue.

MOTION – To Oppose SB 522. MOVE – Hilton. SUPPORT – Beelen. MOTION CARRIED.

4. Federal Issues Update

TEA – 21 : The House (\$284 billion) and Senate (\$295 billion) have passed their bills and it is on to a conference committee today. The aggregate funding level is the biggest issue. The President has said he will veto anything over \$284 billion. The actual amount will be no more than \$220 billion which is the contracting authority. There are growing concerns that the White House is having spending concerns. The current bill has been extended again. On the conference committee will be Ehlers (representing science), Hoekstra (representing transportation), Dingle (representing commerce), and Conyers (representing the judiciary).

5. Proposed Allegan County Casino

Committee Chairman Ted Vonk reported that he had requested the Allegan Casino be put on the agenda because Kent County had decided not to take a position on actions which occur outside of its borders.

Don Stypula stated that the tribe has petitioned to put its land into trust. He also reported the tribe had held a relatively successful job fair. The Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce opposes the casino, while the Grand Rapids Convention and Visitors Bureau quietly supports it. The Kalamazoo Chamber of Commerce also supports the casino.

When Engler was governor, the legislature had given its approval to negotiate a compact. However, that has since been rescinded. Some legislators think approval should be given by means of a bill.

Don Stypula added the Governor and tribe need to come to an agreement on a compact. Nothing can be done until the compact is agreed upon.

Deborah Nier stated that was not correct. The casino can open for class 2 gambling without a compact. They need a compact to do class 3 gambling. It will open as a class 2 even if the class 3 doesn't get approved. They plan to open in 18 months. Once the land went into trust, opponents have 30 days to comment. It is expected a law suit will be filed on the environmental assessment. However, a very thorough assessment was undertaken.

Deborah Nier added that the job fair was very successful with 1,800 participants the first day and 3,000 the second.

Don Hilton questioned whether it was federally mandated that if the Governor doesn't negotiate a compact there is some sort of federal recourse. He added that the casino will happen, regardless of whether we want it or not.

Jim Day stated once the land has been put into trust, there has never been a case where a compact was not negotiated.

Bill Wiersma stated opponents may delay the casino, but they will not stop it. The Senate had approved it, but then they rescinded. He added that he really doesn't see a huge negative impact. It would be a positive for Allegan, Kalamazoo, etc. What say should Grand Rapids have in the matter?

Don Hilton stated he knows elected officials in northern areas and they have indicated casinos have brought problems to their communities.

Deborah Nier stated that she comes from a casino town and has seen none of the problems they were originally afraid of. They just didn't bear out. The biggest problem reported were people trying to get in who were underage, and people jumping from the river boat. Our group took great pains to assure no problems developed. There was a very strong marketing study which showed the clients who frequent a casino are not the same ones who attend other venues.

The Wayland City Council formally took a position on putting the land into trust. The City of Wayland has said it is a Wayland Township issue and therefore has not formally taken a position on it. The Wayland Chamber of Commerce supports it.

6. Other Issues

There will be no meeting in July.

7. Adjournment – 9:30 a.m.