

Public Affairs | 2017 in Review

For over

150

years, the **Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce**



has advocated for a vibrant business climate in the East Metro. To promote a healthy economy, the Chamber's public affairs team actively engages with local, state, and federal government officials on issues that impact the business community. This report highlights the Chamber's advocacy and public affairs accomplishments in 2017.

Direct Advocacy

We tirelessly provided day-to-day assistance to our members as they faced the challenges of operation. We worked closely with numerous East Metro elected officials and municipal staff on issues of concern to our members as a whole and individually.



Some of the individual issues we helped members solve included:

- Ensuring that elected officials understood the harm caused by the Earned Sick and Safe Time Ordinance, specifically harm done by not including any exemptions
- Supporting members' applications for variances to zoning rules
- Assisting members in finding the right point of contact at the municipal level to address their concerns
- Resolving a problem with obtaining outdoor seating for a new brewery in a way that the municipality had not done before

On a broader level, we assisted members by:

- Ensuring that the business voice was heard during the discussions about a proposed ban on to-go containers, which was tabled by the City Council
- Supporting state-wide labor standards at the State Legislature
- Digging deeply into the old Right of Way Assessment and new Street Maintenance Fees to provide an understandable summary
- Advocating for an increase in Ramsey and Washington Counties' sales tax for transit
- Advocating for many individual members' specific legislative or program concerns by submitting formal letters of support
- Heightening awareness on issues of regional importance such as transit, support for DACA, pieces of the federal tax bill, and ADA compliance. This involved both public representation on issues and writing opinion pieces for publication

Transit and Transportation

We continue to lead the push for funding in a predictable, guaranteed framework to accelerate transit build-out of the East Metro enabling connectivity throughout the region. We educate stakeholders, so that these issues continue to be top-of-mind. On specific lines, the Chamber partnered with Ramsey County in advocacy efforts on the Riverview Corridor, the Gateway Corridor, and the Rush Line Corridor projects. We continue to partner with East Metro Strong, an agency whose sole purpose is to be the voice for transit priorities in the East Metro. Leadership came from SPACC staff and Board members.

In the spring we partnered with the Saint Paul Mayor's Office, Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, and East Metro Strong to draw attention to funding cuts and policies introduced at the legislature that would have killed all future transit growth in the region. Our efforts put pressure on members of the Transportation conference committee to approach their final compromise in a more judicious manner.



Elections

Our elected officials are important partners in SPACC's work. We work to educate candidates on issues of importance to the business community, and educate voters on candidates' platforms.

Fun Fact!

3 of 4 Mayors elected within our footprint in 2017 are women

East Metro Voter Guide

For the seventh year, thousands of people visited the Chamber's East Metro Voter Guide to inform themselves about candidates for local office in our area. The site published candidate questionnaires completed by candidates seeking office for county commissioner, city council, and mayoral positions so that voters could hear directly from them about issues relevant to businesses and the broader community in the East Metro. During 2017 there were over 6,000 page views on the Candidate page with the majority of those coming in the fall making this an obviously-used source of information for voters.

Saint Paul Area Chamber Political Action Committee (PAC)

The PAC, an entity separate from the Chamber, supports Chamber goals by endorsing candidates, raising money to help those candidates, and promoting the Chamber's agenda with candidates. In 2017 the PAC endorsed Pat Harris in his unsuccessful bid to be mayor of Saint Paul. We will continue our ongoing efforts to advance the art of civil discourse while we build and maintain relationships with City Hall, especially with Mayor-elect Melvin Carter.



Partnerships

A strong connection exists between wellness and a vibrant business community, and businesses can save significant amounts of money by recycling and finding ways to be more energy efficient. We are happy to partner with Ramsey County to promote wellness and recycling with organizations in Ramsey County.

Workplace Wellness

In 2017 we continued our partnership with Saint Paul/Ramsey County Public Health for worksite wellness programs, using money from the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP). This work covers four areas of wellness: physical activity, healthy eating, support for nursing mothers, and tobacco cessation.

The partnership successfully granted almost \$10,000 to 29 businesses in Ramsey County and will continue granting in 2018. Granted projects included: giving gardens, dedicated spaces for nursing mothers to pump milk, providing bike racks and bike repair equipment, physical activity stations, and appliances and programs making it easier for employees to bring healthy food to work.



Fresh Energy Wellness Room

Workplace Wellness testimonial:

“We have had SO MANY positive comments about our Mothers Room here at MDE! A staff person new to my division raves about it almost daily. She says it’s her favorite place in the building, and she feels like she could just hang out in one of those curtained cubicles with her laptop all day. Professionals visiting from other organizations for meetings and conferences have said the MDE Mothers Room is the best and most comfortable they have experienced. We’re just so pleased with our space, and are so grateful to SPACC and Ramsey County Public Health, and SHIP for making the upgrades possible!!”

Jennifer M. Verbrugge
Minnesota Department of Education

BizRecycling

This year SPACC partnered again with Ramsey County to make it easier for businesses to recycle through the BizRecycling program. Organizations received free consultations on how to save money on trash bills and make recycling systems more efficient, and grant funds to purchase supplies and/or implement changes



Programming and Events



Our Public Affairs Series continued a winning tradition by providing over 1,000 guests with compelling speakers educating us on local, state, and even national issues. During our Political Leadership Luncheon we celebrated local elected leaders and communities for their work in building a stronger East Metro.

Our Public Affairs Committee provides members with updates on projects and issues in the region, from elected officials, partners, and other decision makers, including:

- Projects in the East Metro area to reduce homelessness, ensure skyway vitality, and maintain street maintenance projects
- Impending \$15 minimum wage debate and study by the Citizens League
- 2017 electoral trends and upcoming 2018 races that will affect the East Metro
- PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) study and recommendations to allow

nonprofits to contribute monetarily to the city budget, since, as exempt entities, they cannot be assessed property taxes that otherwise fund infrastructure and operations

- The economic, logistical, and regulatory impacts of hosting Super Bowl LII
- Ford Site development plans
- Rice and Larpenteur corridor redevelopment partnership

Fun Fact!

The corner of Rice and Larpenteur contains borders for three cities (Saint Paul, Roseville and Maplewood) and three Ramsey County Commissioner districts – 3,7, and 2. The three municipalities won the Leaders in Local Government Award for Planning, Zoning and Land Use for their work to revitalize the area at this year's Political Leadership Luncheon.

Energy Efficiency

SPACC explored programming models that could accelerate adoption of energy efficiency programs by small and mid-size businesses. Working with Great Plains Institute through a generous planning grant from the McKnight Foundation, we produced the "[Clean Energy Programming Opportunities for Small to Medium Businesses](#)" report. The report catalogs existing programs, assesses market barriers, identifies logical partners for Twin Cities-wide accelerated adoption programs, builds a model report structure to evaluate the success of such a program, and identifies logical advocacy partners.

It is our sincere hope that another organization will make great use of the information in this report, which will help to greatly reduce the learning curve and increase competency to implement an initiative.

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