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Where We Stand

Business Advocacy Priority Agenda

2021-2022

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**WESTERVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MISSION**

To enhance the business climate and quality of life in our community

***Westerville Area Chamber of Commerce***

***Business Advocacy Council***

Every business, no matter how large or small, operates within a world of policy, regulations, laws, and long-range planning. Most government officials want to have a strong relationship with the people they serve. Therefore, businesses and organizations representing them (such as the Westerville Area Chamber of Commerce) have a duty to express their opinions and interests on matters that affect their community. Whether in Washington DC, the state capitol, or city hall, the opinions of people in the officials’ home district are the most important influences on their decisions.

Advocacy is a critical activity of the Westerville Area Chamber (Chamber) and its members, representing 16,200 workers. That is why the Chamber works to improve the business climate at the state and local level every day. This document serves as our government relations agenda/guideline and is a result of the input of our members.

***BUSINESS ADVOCACY COUNCIL***

***PURPOSE STATEMENT***

The Business Advocacy Council of the **Westerville Area Chamber of Commerce** is committed to reviewing, developing, and supporting issues and candidates that promote a positive, pro-active business environment. The Chamber believes that candidates, laws, and regulations should serve the public without acting as a detriment to business development and growth.

The issues examined through our Business Advocacy agenda are issues raised by the Chamber membership through survey results or the Chamber Board of Trustees. We also respond to issues and/or concerns raised by members.

Our purpose is to work with our elected officials to ensure regulations and policies will positively affect the ability of a business to compete in the worldwide economy and continue to generate income and jobs that will further strengthen the positive business climate for area businesses to thrive and compete.

The Business Advocacy Council (BAC) believes their efforts will positively impact the overall strategic goals of the Chamber.

* **Grow membership and increase engagement to optimize the value of**

**membership**

* **Serve a business connector on issues and opportunities to achieve an informed membership and informed government officials**.
* **Increase the Chamber’s brand awareness as a business leadership organization that fosters positive ties to our mission and BHAG** (An organization that every business believes they should belong.)

Individual chamber businesses can add value to their business, optimize the value of membership and support the success of the Chamber by direct participation in BAC meetings and events.

***BUSINESS ADVOCACY COUNCIL OBJECTIVES***

* Work with Ohio Chamber to review local, state, and federal issues that affect business.
* A picture containing text, indoor

  Description automatically generatedBuild and influence collaborative relationships/partnerships with state legislators, Westerville City Council and Westerville Board of Education members, and county commissioners and township trustees.
* Establish and maintain dialogue among our businesses and community and state leaders to foster growth and connectivity within the greater Westerville area.
* Events that support our purpose and our self-supporting include:
  + “Meet Your Legislators”
  + “Candidate Forums”
  + “Election Academy”
  + “Legislative Forum”
* Submit recommendations related to selected ballot issues/and or candidates for elected office to the Chamber Board of Trustees for consideration.
* If a recommendation is approved by the Board of Trustees, Council members and the Chamber staff can represent the Chamber at public forums and work with public leaders to create and develop pro-active legislation and policies.
* Educate and inform chamber members of relevant issues researched and positions taken related to the priorities stated in this document.
* BAC decisions should stay focused on the impact the issue or platform may or will have on business.

***BUSINESS ADVOCACY COUNCIL PRIORITIES***

The intent of documenting the Business Advocacy Council’s priorities is to articulate the issues that have been identified as particularly important by our Chamber membership. This document will be referred to as the ‘Priority Agenda’ and used as a guide throughout the year. Through this effort and advocacy, the Westerville Area Chamber *serves as a business connector to achieve an informed membership and informed government officials*.

The following are issues identified by Westerville Area Chamber membership as areas of concern and serve as the priorities guiding the committee:

***Workforce Training & Access to Qualified Talent***

***Business Regulation (includes Taxation)***

***Pandemic Recovery and Healthcare***

*In our effort to effectively inform and engage our members of the council, they:*

* will periodically provide updates to the membership on various priorities as the committee deems necessary to achieve an informed membership; and
* may submit a position/recommendation to the Board of Trustees for consideration of significant key priority legislative or ballot issue(s).

*(See detailed explanations and actions on pages 4 -5.)*

***ACCESS TO WORKFORCE (and Workforce Training)***

To respond to the growing demands more effectively on today’s - and tomorrow’s - businesses, we must consider a wide array of issues. Our employers depend upon a well-educated, prepared workforce, yet many of our members are experiencing workforce challenges. Education and training today take many forms, ranging from traditional education (Kindergarten through 12th grade and two or four-year colleges) to learning mediums (Internet distance learning, on-the-job training, and hybrid of classroom & online). Therefore, the Chamber will respond to the needs of Ohio employers for qualified, well-trained employees by:

* + deploying the action related to workforce development and talent attraction needs to be realized from the talent assessment and development strategy completed in partnership with the Westerville Partnership in July 2019.
  + advancing the workforce study through the creation and continuation of the Westerville WorkWISE Collective of at least made up of seven business industries, a representative from the Westerville Partnership, Columbu. State., the Workforce Development Board of Central Ohio and WARM.
  + identifying the business community’s needs on a local and regional basis in cooperation with economic development professionals and educational institutions.
  + identifying issues and trends that may be impediments to developing an available workforce for existing and projected needs of the business community.
  + supporting a strong educational and training system and initiatives tailored to prepare workers with the skills needed to excel in the future economy.
  + strengthening our school district’s Business Advisory Council to assist in continuous relationship building with our area employers.
  + supporting efforts for better alignment amongst state and county agencies responsible for workforce assistance and streamline access to these workforce programs.
  + supporting efforts to expose students to the variety of technical training (apprenticeships and community colleges) that may enhance students’ skills and lead to fulfilling career options.
  + promoting policies that address the demands of the business community and human resources needed to fill available jobs today and in the future.
  + considering the needs of businesses that have exhausted resources for qualified applicants for technical positions and support efforts to employ international talent without the limitations of approved/certified visas.

***BUSINESS REGULATIONS***

Business regulations and taxation are oftentimes a significant factor in the day-to-day operations and decision-making process for businesses.

To effectively address the impact on members, The Chamber will monitor, review, and report various types of federal, state, and local regulations to keep our members informed and communicate with elected officials with concerns and clarifications needed.

To remain competitive as a place where businesses want to be, the Westerville Area Chamber supports actions that make the Westerville area and, if necessary, our region and/or our state a more business-friendly environment. We work to promote the establishment and growth of businesses in our area. Specifically, it is critical to monitor any changes to commercial zoning and signage regulations at a local level as these areas of business regulations are a concern to members.

**Pandemic Recovery/Healthcare**

We support meaningful reform aimed at lowering the overall health care costs for employers and are interested in opposing the enactment of new healthcare mandates.

* Encourage health care that provides businesses the flexibility to incorporate health coverage as an employee benefit at a cost the works (affordable) for the business.
* Support efforts of employers to encourage healthy behaviors and reward employees for taking steps to be well.
* Support and entice growth for healthcare organizations in the Westerville area.

Continue updating the COVID Toolkit with updates in CDC and orders from the State of Ohio Governor regarding what is prohibited, discouraged, and permitted with COVID precautions to keep ourselves and others safe.

A group of people sitting at tables

Description automatically generated with medium confidence***ANALYSIS OF AN ISSUE***

The Chamber does not take a position on any candidate race. As a non-partisan organization, the Chamber works closely with its partners in government regardless of party affiliation. To that end, the Chamber does not take a position on any candidate race.

To maintain its stance as a reliable resource for informed voting, the chamber believes it is important to provide opportunities for members to meet candidates through information sessions, candidate forums, or networking gatherings, when possible.

It is the intent of the Business Advocacy Council to produce a well-defined and straightforward process to ensure a quick response. Working backward from a “need by” date, the committee may quickly identify the maximum allowable time frame to gather all information and confirm all relevant facts.

**Procedure followed by Business Advocacy Council, analysis and action of the following:**

**Ballot Issues:**

* Request and confirm information offered by all interested parties in a timely manner.
* Determine who will be affected by the issue.
* Determine how the issue will impact the business membership and community.
* Provide the Chamber Board of Trustees information in advance of the board meeting.
* Offer the opportunity for the Chamber Board of Trustees to submit questions regarding issues.

**Make BAC recommendation of a position for Chamber Board of Trustees** to approve. (Ideal time frame is giving the Board of Trustees 30 days to make a decision) If approved determine level of action to be taken.

**Legislative Issue (not on a ballot for community vote):**

* Ensure the issue relates to one of the topical areas of the committee’s approved priority agenda.
* Request and confirm factual information offered by all interested parties in a timely manner.
* Determine whom the issue will affect.
* Determine how the issue will impact the business membership and community.

**Inform the Chamber Board** of the council’s decision, how the decision relates to business, and note the relation to the approved Business Advocacy Agenda.

***Ballot Issue and Review Guidelines***

**After the review of an issue, but prior to developing a recommendation for submission of a formal recommendation to the Board, the Business Advocacy Council should review the process taken by asking:**

* Were the facts thoroughly reviewed and independently confirmed?
* Was information sought from all interested parties?
* Were those involved in the decision truly disinterested?
* Was the decision consistent with the results of the standards applied?
* Was the decision consistent with the stated ideals of the Westerville Area Chamber?
* Did we clearly articulate the business reason for our decision?
* Would a second group of disinterested review committee members reach the same decision or draw the same conclusions?
* Did we develop sufficient information, leadership, and communications to positively impact the outcome?

**After analysis of a ballot issue, the Business Advocacy Council will recommend that the Chamber Board of Trustees:**

* Take NO ACTION **OR**
* Inform the members of the issue/candidate **OR**
* Inform the members of the issue/candidate and monitor the progression **OR**
* Inform the members of a position on an issue, call membership to action, post position on the Chamber website, and send a letter to the editor of Westerville news publications.

**If action approved (either pro-con):**

* Council will craft necessary communications, assure position is submitted to the local newspapers, posted on the Chamber website, and explained in the member newsletter.
* The Chamber President/CEO and/or Chamber Chairman of the Board will notify the campaign manager of the issue of the Chamber’s position.
* The Chamber President/CEO and Chairman of the Board (unless appointed to represent one of these positions) should be the only two individuals speaking at public forums and the media on behalf of the chamber position.

**Through the Chamber President/CEO, the council should follow up with the Chamber membership after an election, voting public, or vote by a legislative body to communicate the results of our position and the impact of the results on businesses.**

**Contact List**

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A person smiling with his eyes closed

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