Alberta

Canadian Home Builders' Association

CHBA – Alberta Member Toolkit

2016 Advocacy

DRAFT

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Purpose

In a regulated industry such as homebuilding, it is important to maintain a cordial and productive relationship with the decision-makers in the government. For CHBA – Alberta this means working in partnership with the Government of Alberta to ensure the residential construction industry and consumers are not adversely affected by new laws and regulations or changes to existing ones; and acting as a key resource to the government for information and support regarding the residential construction industry.

The overarching goal of CHBA – Alberta's government relations activities is to have government officials in all areas think "homebuilding equals CHBA". The Association will be their first call as a reliable source of information, new policy ideas, and a partner in satisfying the consumer (who is also the voter).

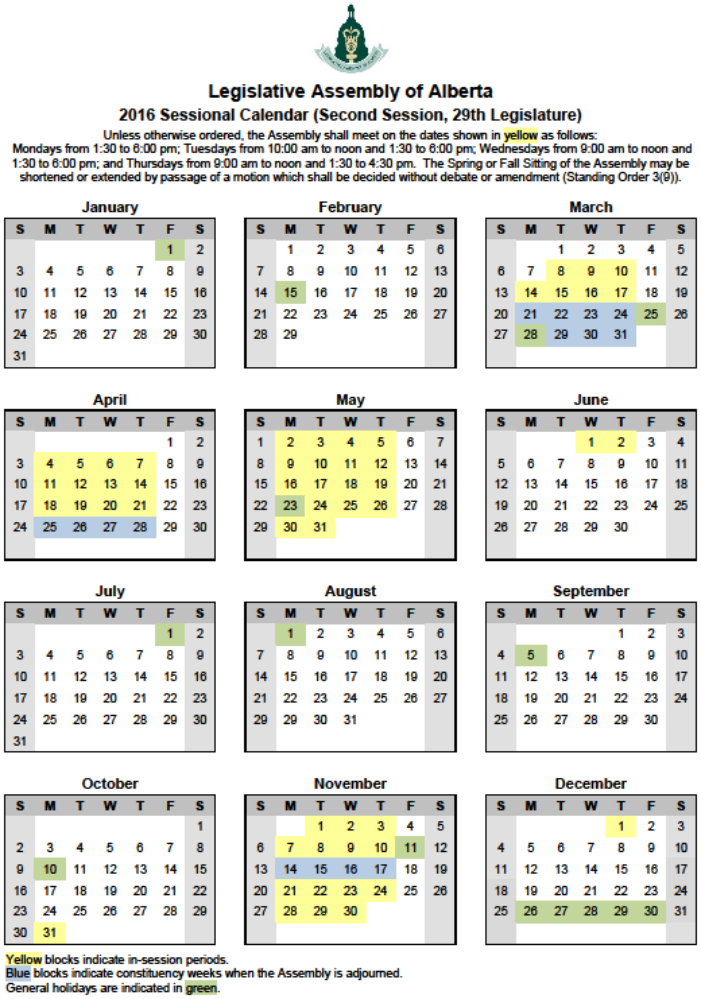
CHBA – Alberta focuses on issues and initiatives at the provincial government level. This includes direct interaction with Ministers and MLAs. As a member, you have a crucial role to play. Whether you are serving on the Board of Directors, volunteering to sit on a committee, or simply an interested observer in your community, this package will be part of giving you the ability to engage on behalf of the industry with the provincial politicians that impact your business.

This toolkit focuses on key and recurring issues for 2016. Inside you'll see simple summaries of our positions on these issues, reference information relating to the provincial government, and simple guidelines on how you can engage with elected officials directly.

2016 Legislative Calendar

When attempting to contact MLAs it is important to focus efforts on the parts of their schedule where they will be most likely to respond. This year's projected legislative calendar is below.

- On the dates highlighted in yellow, MLAs are most likely to be in Edmonton attending sittings of the legislature.
- During session, the legislature does not sit on Fridays. This is referred to as a 'constituency day'. In theory (and usually in practice) this means the MLA will be in the constituency either attending events or meetings. This also allows MLAs not from the Capital Region to be home for more time than would otherwise be available.
- Similarly, the blue blocks are called 'constituency weeks'. Day-to-day activity is not taking place in the legislature and MLAs are likely back in their constituency, specifically to meet with local citizens and stakeholders.
- This year, the legislature sits during the March to early June timeframe, and again throughout November. Outside of these months, MLAs spend the most time in their constituency and may be available to meet or attend events.



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

2016 Sessional Calendar (Second Session, 29th Legislature)

Unless otherwise ordered, the Assembly shall meet on the dates shown in yellow as follows:
Mondays from 1:30 to 6:00 pm; Tuesdays from 10:00 am to noon and 1:30 to 6:00 pm; Wednesdays from 9:00 am to noon and 1:30 to 6:00 pm; and Thursdays from 9:00 am to noon and 1:30 to 4:30 pm. The Spring or Fall Sitting of the Assembly may be shortened or extended by passage of a motion which shall be decided without debate or amendment (Standing Order 3(9)).

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Yellow blocks indicate in-session periods.
Blue blocks indicate constituency weeks when the Assembly is adjourned.
General holidays are indicated in green.

Contacts

Contacting an MLA or a Minister is straightforward. The provincial government is very open about receiving calls, emails and meeting requests from interested groups and individuals.

There are several times when it may be valuable to reach out directly to your MLA, such as:

- Congratulations on a recent election or appointment
- As part of a CHBA – Alberta call to action regarding a specific provincial issue
- Arranging a meeting to build a relationship or discuss a provincial policy having a local impact
- Inviting them to a local event

A word of caution – please remember that only individual donations to political parties are allowed in Alberta. Corporate donations, whether through direct payment or reimbursement are prohibited. This includes not just financial contributions to campaigns but attendance at dinners, golf tournaments and other fundraising events.

A full listing of MLAs along with their office addresses, phone numbers and biographies can be found at http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=mla_home

Additionally, each MLA can be reached via email through the same email form. Firstname.lastname@assembly.ab.ca

If you wish to contact a Minister, sending an email directly may work may work, but it also may be more productive to connect with a staffer dedicated to scheduling and correspondence. The full listing of Alberta government employees, including these staffers, can be found at: http://www.alberta.ca/contact.cfm which features both a searchable list and printable directories for government departments.

If you have any questions relating to touching base with an MLA, do not hesitate to contact External Affairs Manager T.J. Keil. These could range from protocols and meeting tips, to asking whether a particular MLA will be interested in a certain issue.

If you do reach out, we also appreciate you providing feedback to CHBA – Alberta on how the MLA responded, any key asks or help the Association can provide, or if any relevant information relating to government's plans was passed along.

Advocacy One Pagers

In order to keep our members informed and able to communicate in a simple and direct manner on key issues, we have developed straightforward one page guides on some of the most pressing matters facing members this year. These can be a guide to answering questions or quickly speaking on a topic with an MLA or interested staffer. CHBA – Alberta has more detailed information relating to all of these issues available upon request, and can also provide support in person if that is desired. Do not hesitate to refer interested MLAs to us directly, or contact us for additional information.

Housing Portfolio Talking Points

WHAT – An enhanced Housing portfolio within government to bring together policy areas that are currently overshadowed by other ministries or spread throughout government to produce a cohesive perspective from the provincial government. This department would also act as a lens to aid the actions of other departments such as Infrastructure and Municipal Affairs.

WHY – Issues from seniors housing to condominium regulations to schools and many others all impact whether Albertans will be able to afford a home and choose the sort of community they would like to live in. The Housing portfolio was recently elevated as part of the Seniors and Housing ministry, partly due to our Association's advocacy on the topic. It is important to continue advocating for an enhanced role for this department.

HOW – Speak to MLAs and Ministers about including an enhanced Housing portfolio in government. Tell them that the responsibility for building the vibrant communities Albertans want is spread across many ministries creating challenges for the government, industry and Albertans. Share our idea that an enhanced Housing department could act as a hub for knowledge and action relating to building communities

Climate Leadership Talking Points

WHAT – The provincial government is implementing a climate leadership strategy which will impact every Albertan and Alberta business in some way. A panel has drafted a report to government offering a variety of recommendations. This will result in policy and actions relating to greenhouse gas emissions.

WHY – Our industry has a strong story to tell when it comes to the innovation homes have seen in the past decades. While we are a leader in this area and will continue to be, there are areas where policy changes would be much more effective (such as retrofitting incentives) than others (such as additional code requirements for new homes). Many policy options also have detrimental impacts to affordability and must be avoided.

HOW – Talk to decision makers and Albertans to show how we have already made great strides in improving energy efficiency of new homes. We're also being proactive to show how the residential construction industry can continue to lead in this area. Let them know that:

- We believe that sustainability and affordability are not mutually exclusive.
- The most effective way to reduce residential energy use and emissions is therefore through retrofitting of existing homes.
- A simple and flexible mandatory labelling system for all new and existing homes would provide a reliable method to show value and inform purchasers as to potential future operating costs and savings.
- It has been the experience across North America that builder and homeowner incentives are highly effective in promoting new 'green' technologies.
- Demonstration and pilot projects are key to innovation in energy efficient housing.
- Our Climate Leadership Committee will be developing proactive and solutions relating to emissions and efficiency.

Residential Sprinkler Talking Points

WHAT – Some municipalities and sprinkler advocates have spent a great deal of effort arguing that fire sprinklers should be mandatory for single-family homes. This is despite the lack of benefit that can be shown from their installation.

WHY – CHBA – Alberta believes that for a product to be mandated through changes to codes and requirements for homes their value must be able to be justified by showing a benefit to the home buyer and backed up by strong statistical justification rather than political sentiment.

HOW – Talk to decision makers and Albertans to assure them that while new homes are already highly fire resistant and incredibly safe (which is why residential fire deaths in new homes are essentially non-existent), the industry is always looking to provide a better product to its customers. Let them know that:

- Many CHBA members offer sprinkler systems as a choice to their consumers and we support their effort.
- There is currently nothing in the building code preventing the installation of sprinklers in single family homes.
- Unfortunately, There are many practical issues regarding residential sprinkler systems for single-family homes (significant upfront costs, static solution vs. dynamic, mechanical issues, site servicing, installer training, cost effectiveness) and these are best solved by the marketplace.

STANDATA Talking Points

WHAT – STANDATA is a tool to provide clarity and uniformity of code interpretations throughout Alberta, especially between code cycles.

WHY – This tool helps municipalities and industry by providing a flexible and immediate remedy for the department of Municipal Affairs to use in response to problems of confusion and differing interpretations of Code.

HOW – Talk to your MLA about the benefits of this tool and ask him to encourage Municipal Affairs to issue STANDATAs more frequently in response to the concerns of industry and municipalities. Share your experiences and challenges relating to code interpretation. Let them know that CHBA – Alberta is ready and able to assist in identifying issues that could be remedied with STANDATA.

Inclusionary Zoning

WHAT – "Inclusionary zoning" refers to municipal policies that require the provision by the private sector of subsidized, below market price housing as part of a larger residential development. In most cases the cost of subsidizing the "affordable" units is then passed on to the purchasers of the remaining units in the development. This increase in price pushes those on the margins such as first time buyers, seniors and the most vulnerable out of the market and also increases housing prices across a community.

WHY – Creating communities people can afford to live in is a challenge in Alberta for many reasons, but inclusionary zoning policy does not and will not address this challenge. Subsidize the person who needs it, not the house.

HOW – Talk to decision makers at all levels about why inclusionary zoning does not work. Note that CHBA – Alberta has offered to collaborate with all interested groups including municipalities, not-for-profits and the provincial government to ensure there is A Home for Every Albertan. Speak about our January 2016 Affordability Matters event that brought together stakeholders from across the housing spectrum to work on solutions to these challenges. Share the positive alternatives that exist to address social housing needs including:

- Subsidizing the purchaser through the whole tax base, rather than transferring the burden to the purchaser's new neighbours.
- More market housing through increased supply and diversity.
- Non-profit initiatives such as Habitat for Humanity, Attainable Homes and Resolve Calgary.
- Collaborating with all levels of government to ensure additional cost pressures are removed and policies do not unintentionally impact affordability.

MGA Review and City Charters

WHAT – The Municipal Government Act (MGA) review is a big deal for our industry. The legislation defines the powers of every municipality where our members build or renovate homes. The MGA itself is a big deal – 500 pages and more than 650 sections.

WHY – Building homes and communities people can afford to live in is what members set out to do every day. Changes to the MGA have a potential to significantly impact this goal.

HOW – Talk to decision makers at all levels sharing our key messages about the principles relating to the MGA that are necessary for its success. Ask that they share these with their colleagues, Cabinet and the Premier.

- The revised MGA needs to reflect the principles of clarity, accountability and maintaining a competitive Alberta.

- There are many situations where conflict relating to provincial law arises and there needs to be a third party conflict resolution process.

- We support municipalities having the funds to deliver on their legislated responsibilities, but these must be clear.

City Charter discussions are also important. Remind decision makers that:

- The principles discussed during the MGA review need to be reflected in the City Charters, especially competitiveness and accountability.

- While bigger cities may have more capacity, they are still unable to act as an unbiased third party in disputes.

- Inclusionary zoning is not permitted under the current Municipal Government Act and should not be included in revisions to the Act or City Charters. The practice acts as a barrier to overall housing affordability and supply.