Issues Update:

Zoning Reform
Governor Charlie Baker has re-filed legislation that seeks to allow communities to amend current zoning laws by a simply majority to allow for the approval of more housing units across Massachusetts. The Governor estimates that Massachusetts will need an additional 135,000 units of housing in order to provide adequate housing for the state's families and workforce. The Governor has identified the strict amendment process for local zoning by-laws as one of the primary reasons for the lack of sufficient housing in the state.

The Governor's bill would allow cities and towns to adopt the majority rule proposals for zoning ordinances that address the areas of cluster zoning, starter home districts and transit-oriented developments. It will also allow them to reduce the threshold for approving Special Permits on changes to lot sizes, density and parking requirements. Multi-family projects could also be approved by a majority vote if ten percent of the units are set aside as affordable.

Housing Transfer Tax
Governor Baker has included a proposal in his FY 2020 budget recommendation that seeks to increase the current deeds excise tax by 50% which would increase the tax from the current $4 per thousand to $6 per thousand. The new funds would be earmarked to a Global Warming Trust Fund which would be allocated to cities and towns to help fund projects to help protect property from weather related storms. This proposal is being considered by the House Committee on Ways and Means which is expected to release their version of the state budget in early April.

Limits on Light Frame Wood Construction
Several pieces of legislation have been filed this year in response to the 3 fires that occurred during last several years at 6 story wood frame apartment buildings that were under construction. The Massachusetts building code previously restricted the size of wood constructed apartments but recently adopted the International Building Code that allows for the construction of the 6 story buildings. These bills seek to limit wood frame construction to no more than 4 stories if they use noncombustible materials or fire-retardant treated wood. The building height would be limited to 3 stories if unprotected wood is used. They would also require the adoption of stricter safety ratings for floors, ceilings and roof. Emblems would be required to be posted on the front of building to notify firefighters if wood truss construction has been used in the structure. Contractors would also be required to hire a “Fire Warden” after hours and on weekends to help prevent a fire event.

Truck Side Guards
On March 28th MRLDA submitted testimony to the Committee on Transportation in opposition to House Bill 3058 which would require the installation of side guards on all delivery vehicles that operate in Massachusetts. We pointed out that this language would make it more difficult to load delivery vehicles if our access to the side of the truck is restricted. Our increased costs to operate will result in increased costs to our customers. The committee has considered this bill in the past and amended it to limit its application to only those vehicles that involved in state issued procurement contracts. Attempts to pass the amended version in the House of Representatives have previously failed.

Questions?
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