

Deseret Morning News, Thursday, March 02, 2006

Municipalities flex their muscles

But despite wins, many leaders left with bad taste

By [Nicole Warburton](#)

Deseret Morning News

Utah's municipalities proved their mettle this legislative session, waging war against a controversial land-use bill and joining forces to overhaul local redevelopment laws.

The city of Sandy even found a way to possibly fund its planned soccer stadium, despite promises of a fight from tax watchdog groups.

Overall, the outcome was good for local governments at the 2006 Legislature. However, many municipal leaders said they were left with bad feelings, particularly as so-called "message" bills surfaced and legislation passed that could personally benefit some lawmakers.

The cynicism started a week into the session with the introduction of SB170, a controversial land-use bill sponsored by Sen. Al Mansell, R-Sandy. The bill, which would have revised municipal zoning laws, never got a hearing and the sponsor admitted it was "over the top."

Two replacements for the measure, SB267 and SB268, received legislative approval earlier this week. Local leaders supported the bills.

Another controversial bill surfaced midway through the session. HB371 allows counties to levy a tax on hotel accommodations to help fund tourism projects — including soccer stadiums and county convention centers. It received legislative approval on Wednesday and now goes to the governor for his signature or veto.

Sandy Mayor Tom Dolan said the bill, if approved by the governor, will allow his city to "start discussions" with Salt Lake County about how to fund the Real Salt Lake soccer stadium in Sandy.

But the Utah Taxpayers Association is asking the governor to veto the measure, saying it's not an appropriate use of tourism dollars. If not, "other options" are available to kill the bill, said Mike Jerman, vice president of the Taxpayers Association.

Consensus was reached on other legislation, however. The redevelopment agency (RDA) overhaul bills sponsored by Sen. Curt Bramble, R-Provo, received near-unanimous approval in both the House and Senate. One tightens current RDA laws, while the other could allow for redevelopment of the Geneva Steel site in Orem.

Salt Lake City was provided with a way to finance the straightening of a section of Union Pacific Railroad track. The track, because of a slight curvature, has forced trains onto a track in a city neighborhood, causing concern among residents.

Constant disagreements over Salt Lake County District Attorney David Yocom's advice to the County Council might subside after a bill allowing the council to hire its own attorney won approval from the Legislature. SB249 allows county councils in an executive-council form of government to hire private attorneys instead of relying solely on legal advice from the district attorney's office.

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