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CARPD NEWSLETTER ARTICLE
Legislative Update by Russell W. Noack
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Despite the introduction of a vaccine to targeted segments of the population, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to negatively affect the legislative process. Due to the significant increase in the number of cases in December and the need to adhere to the shelter in place policy throughout the state, leadership decided to delay convening the 2021-22 Legislative Session until January 11. When the Legislature resumed, the Democrats once again held supermajorities in both Houses. The Assembly now has 59 Democrats, 19 Republicans, 1 Independent (Chad Mayes) and 1 vacancy since Shirley Weber has been appointed to replace Alex Padilla as the Secretary of State. The Senate roster is 30 Democrats, 9 Republicans and 1 vacancy since Holly Mitchell won a seat on the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors.

Governor Newsom released a \$227 billion State Budget proposal providing for significant funding to support his highest program priorities. Since tax revenues have exceeded all expectations, the Governor is calling on the Legislature to expedite funding in a number of areas, including vaccine distribution, reopening of schools, assistance for low-income families, funds for businesses hurt severely by COVID-19 restrictions and restoration of wages to state workers who received pay cuts last year. The Governor's Budget proposal further enhances many of his priority areas, which had limited funding increases in 2020 including environmental protection, climate change, natural resource programs, wildfire prevention, emergency preparedness and response, affordable housing, and homelessness. Budget hearings, which will allow legislative input, have begun and will continue for the next four months prior to the final Budget being enacted by the commencement of the new fiscal year on July 1.

Although legislative leaders have established the chairs and makeup of the various policy committees, the committees themselves have not begun conducting hearings to date. Once again, this year, most of the participation of the public at hearings will be provided by virtual or telephonic testimony. The Capitol remains restricted for the time being to try to combat the spread of the pandemic to legislators and staff. Committee activity will accelerate after the bill introduction deadline date of February 19. Interestingly, the leaders of both Houses have decided to not reduce the number of bill introductions by their members, so we can expect the usual avalanche of bills coming to light in late February.

Some holdover bills have been reintroduced by members in the new legislative session. A \$5.5 billion bond package, if approved by the voters on the 2022 Ballot, would fund wildfire prevention, safe drinking water, drought preparation, and flood protection programs has been introduced by Senator Anthony Portantino. The bond measure is [Senate Bill 45](#), which mirrors the number and content of last year's bill authored by Senator Ben Allen. Discussions about building the bill out, including inserting a per capita feature will begin soon.

[Assembly Constitution Amendment No. 1](#) has been reintroduced by Cecilia Aguiar-Curry. The measure would place on the 2022 Ballot provisions to reduce the vote threshold for passage of local government tax investments in affordable housing and infrastructure improvements to 55% instead of the existing 2/3 vote requirement. The bill, which would track the vote threshold for school construction bonds, was defeated on the Assembly Floor last year despite garnering 44 recorded votes (54 needed for passage). The author is hopeful some of the new progressive members recently elected to the Legislature will push it over the top in 2021. Anti-tax organizations led by the California Taxpayers Association and the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association will oppose ACA 1 again in 2021.

[Assembly Bill 118](#) by Sydney Kamlager is based on a bill that moved through the process but was not enacted last session. The bill would establish the Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (CRISES) to provide grant opportunities for community organizations who support emergency response activities.

Mitigation fee reform will remain a topic of discussion in 2021. So far, [Assembly Bill 59](#) by Jesse Gabriel has been dropped in as a placeholder bill. Assembly Member Tim Grayson continues to discuss ways to increase transparency and consistency of mitigation fees and will likely introduce a bill soon.

Finally, [Assembly Bill 30](#) by Ash Kalra is an intent bill to subsequently enact legislation that would improve access to nature and recreational and educational opportunities for all people with a specific emphasis for economically disadvantaged communities.

The CARPD Legislative Committee met in December to begin constructing an active legislative program for 2021. Increasing funding opportunities from both state and federal sources and promoting the effort to recognize the major contributions recreation and park districts have made during the COVID-19 crisis including community support for students and their families using facilities for distanced learning, providing testing areas, creating cooling centers for the homeless and providing assistance for wildfire response and fire prevention activities.