



Austin Landline Report April 2019

The Legislature continues to make good progress in both Chambers on its largest issues of appropriations, property tax reform and school finance. They have, however, gotten a little side-tracked on some “culture war” issues. The big news this week is that SB 421 by Sen. Kolkhorst finally passed the full Senate after several weeks of intense negotiations among the stakeholders. The bill would create a comprehensive reformation of the eminent domain process, ensuring that landowners get more realistic offers of compensation and upfront information and assurances about projects and the use of the easements being procured. The battle will now move to the House, where the going is expected to be even more difficult.

We are appreciative of Rep. J.M. Lozano for filing HB 3939 which would strengthen property owners’ rights in allowing surveys to be done by condemning authorities. We are still hopeful that that bill’s language will either be incorporated in the larger House bill, HB 991 by Rep. Burns, or be adopted as a free-standing bill. Either way, it would be a significant step toward leveling the playing field for landowners in the condemnation process.

Through the great efforts of two of our board members, Whit Jones and Eric Opiela, we have also been attempting to preserve the option for landowners to achieve open space tax valuations through contractual arrangements with educational institutions to conduct scientific studies on their properties. We have made a little progress in the House Ways and Means Committee and will pursue additional gains as the bill moves through legislative proceedings.

Bills on groundwater regulation, breeder deer, broadband access and others of interest continue moving forward and we have been involved in the process with most of them. While some of these bills are excellent, some still need some improvement, which your Austin team, including Eric Opiela, Charles Maley, Joe Maley, and Robert Howard, will continue to pursue.

Please stay tuned for weekly updates of our bill tracking list and think about possibly coming to Austin if we need members to testify for one of our bills. If you have ideas or would like additional information, contact me at robert@roberthowardandassociates.com or (512) 567-9470 or go to <https://capitol.texas.gov/>