

Real estate pros form united lobbying front

RECA, similar groups to confront legislators together

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The Real Estate Council of Austin and other metro-area commercial real estate associations in Texas have formed a statewide coalition to monitor and advocate on legislative issues that impact the industry.

The new group, called Real Estate Councils of Texas, consists of the Real Estate Council of Austin, The Real Estate Council in Dallas, Greater Fort Worth Real Estate Council, the Houston Real Estate Council, Houstonians for Responsible Growth and the Real Estate Council of San Antonio.

While each group contracts with lobbyists individually, the new council represents the first joint effort among the real estate associations to have a united presence in the state capital, says Nancy McDonald, director of regional outreach for RECA.

The new council will not hire a new lobbyist, she says, but rather plans to continue contracting lobbyists individually and work in a more coordinated manner.

The coalition's goals include establishing a statewide economic footprint and communicating with policymakers about the potential impact of legislative and regulatory measures on the real estate development industry, McDonald says.

The group's formation marks the first coordinated, statewide effort to represent the entire commercial real estate development

industry in Texas, says Macey Davis, chair of the Real Estate Councils of Texas.

While all of the council's real estate associations have been active in their respective city halls, McDonald says the groups have taken different tentative steps into legislative involvement. RECA, for instance, was formed in 1991, but its first foray into a legislative session didn't come until later that decade, she says.

"The formation of this group is truly one of those 'why haven't we done this before?' moments," says Craig Douglas, who will be RECA's president in 2009. "For an industry as large as ours, a lack of presence

at the capital was having a noticeable effect. ... We heard from elected officials over and over that we had no statewide footprint, and if you really want to be heard, you need to develop a statewide" presence.



Hockenyos



McDonald



Davis

The impact of the development industry on the state's economy is huge, says Jon Hockenyos, president of consulting firm TXP Inc.

"Companies in the development sectors have collectively added tens of thousands of positions since early 2000, in the process paying millions of dollars in wages," Hockenyos says. "The total estimated appraised value of all property in Texas rose to almost \$2 trillion last year, providing the base for tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue for state government as well as schools and local jurisdictions."

Douglas says the council is forming its legislative agenda and hasn't honed in yet on specific legislation it will follow during the upcoming legislative session. In general, he says, some of the most pressing issues for the industry will be those that affect transportation, land use and the margins tax.