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## Rockford, lawmakers say lobbyist critically important to pass legislation and for funding

By Richard Bodee

Apr 14, 2021



By Mary Sugden

ROCKFORD (WREX) — The City of Rockford pays a lobbyist to advocate on its behalf, and city officials and local lawmakers say that's a good thing.

Exactly one week ago, the BMO Harris Bank Center got millions from the state, but few saw the work behind the scenes in Springfield.

"We use our lobbyist in a very efficient and effective manner and try to maximize the return on investment for us," Rockford City Administrator Todd Cagnoni explains.

For the last decade, Rockford has paid Michael Cassidy, who is now with his own firm, Zephyr Government Strategies, to lobby and advocate for the city.

"Typically, on an annual basis, our Legislative and Lobbying Committee, in conjunction with our City Council, approves a number of priorities for our lobbyist to focus on," Cagnoni says.

Rockford City Council approves Cassidy's contract on an annual basis. A couple weeks ago, it re-upped his \$120,000 contract for this year.

In addition to BMO Harris, Cagnoni says infrastructure improvements, youth outreach, and COVID grants for bars and restaurants are a few more recent successes for Cassidy, the city, and residents.

Local lawmakers on both sides of the aisle say Cassidy has been helpful in meeting the city's goals.

"He helped me to make sure we had a presence on a lot of state boards," Democratic State Representative Maurice West says of Cassidy. "He made sure I knew what the City of Rockford, Rockford Mass Transit, the airport — what their issues are and made sure I capitalize when I'm down here in Springfield."

"He's always in conversation with us and letting us know if there's particular bills that Rockford's concerned with or Rockford's supporting," Republican State Representative Joe Sosnowski adds. "He's straight-forward and shares the facts and he's been a good advocate for Rockford."

And as far as those priorities, the city and lawmakers share similar goals for this session, those being domestic violence and mental health legislation, blight reduction, and economic development.

Those goals, Sosnowski and West say, are attainable in some form.



## Rockford Says Lobbyist Critically Important Cagnoni: "\$13 million for BMO Harris is recent success"

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