

PROGRAM POSITIONS OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS KANSAS CITY/JACKSON /CLAY/PLATTE COUNTIES (updated June 2021)

EDUCATION

Kansas City: Support of adequate local tax levies to provide optimum education systems for the school districts within the Kansas City limits. The following criteria should be used to evaluate the adequacy of proposed tax levels:

1. Retention or improvement of the districts state classification.
2. Competitive teacher's salaries among the twelve Kansas City, MO districts

Independence:

1. Support open meetings of the school board for the purpose of informing and soliciting public opinion, and encouraging the public to attend these meetings. (1971)
2. Support a quality education that prepares students for their role as contributors in the changing cultural, social and economic world. (1-1972)
3. Support of the school system in Independence with the objective of providing optimum education for all. (9-1975)

CITY POSITIONS

Kansas City:

Human Resources – (Currently (3-1-04) the functions delineated below are performed or monitored by the City's Human Relations Department. There is no Human Relations Commission now, however a Human Rights Commission (HRC) has the task of responding to all issues of bias although it has no enforcement power.) (Consensus 1966)

Support of equality of opportunity in public accommodations and housing. The Kansas City fair housing ordinance should include these provisions:

1. Coverage of all dwellings except rental units in one-family or two-family owner occupied structures
2. Actions of real estate brokers, lending institutions and builders should be covered.
3. An anti-blockbusting clause should be included.
4. The Human Relations Commission should enforce the ordinance with recourse to the courts.
5. Complaint investigation procedures should be in the following order:
a) voluntary compliance, b) efforts at mediation, c) subpoena of witnesses at all stages, d) public hearings and e) court action
6. The enforcing agency should be allowed to initiate complaints
7. The principle of ascending fines for second violations should be part of the housing ordinance.
8. A program of public education should be instituted by the Human Relations Commission, with a sufficient budget.

City Government

Support of Council-Manager form of government. The following points were emphasized:

1. The six district and the six at-large council members create a representative government that can be responsive to the will of the majority.
2. More emphasis should be placed on the policy-making capabilities of the council
3. Consideration should be given to transfer of some of the detail of the charter to the administrative code.
4. Consideration should be given to methods for strengthening the policy making leadership role of the mayor.

Support of the following City Charter Changes: (Consensus 1972)

1. A considerable increase in the number of signatures required to declare intent to cause referendum petitions to be circulated.
2. Raising the number of signatures required to bring an issue to referendum to about 10% of the registered voters.
3. Charter revision should be done by an appointed non-partisan committee rather than a 13-member elected commission.
4. Charter review body should make proposals to city council every 10 years to be taken as amendment to propositions to the voters.

Support of Planning and Zoning: (Consensus 1977)

1. Applicants for rezoning, opponents, and citizen groups should have equal opportunities to present their information and opinions.
2. Persons appointed to the City Plan Commission and the Board of Zoning Adjustment should have a balance of interest among them.
3. Notification of rezoning hearing should be published in a paper of general circulation other than the Daily record. Written notification of hearings and rehearings to all owners of record and residents of adjoining property should be a requirement. . . .not a courtesy. The notification procedure might include prominently posting a sign at the property, easily recognizable from a distance, at least two weeks before the first hearing.
4. In the planning process, a set of goals should take priority over a map showing proposed uses, although it is understood both are important.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) – Adopted May 2020**STATEMENT OF POSITION**

The League of Women Voters Kansas City/Jackson/Clay/Platte support policies, ordinances, legislation, and programs that ensure property tax abatement development incentives are granted under strict qualifications that ensure the need for such relief is valid, that other public agencies' funding is not adversely impacted and that specific community benefits are made a part of any such property tax abatement.

The League recommends the following actions and considerations as part of the approval process for public financing (i.e., TIF or other similar funding mechanisms):

Administration and Oversight

1. All corporations, companies, partnerships, LLCs, or other entities be thoroughly vetted for financial ability to complete the project both with and without public financing; when necessary, tracing a subsidiary back to the parent company or LLC to the owners.
2. The officers, management and if applicable, subcontractors be vetted with a background check, generally matching the city's hiring practices.
3. Term of public financing mirror the ascendancy of a building's value and stop at generally no longer than 10 years. This would allow the city to continue collecting tax revenue for a portion of the building's more valuable lifespan.
4. The term "blight" as a condition for public financing be applied and used narrowly (poverty, life expectancy and high crime areas).
5. Provide routine, transparent, easy-to-understand reporting mechanisms, such as quarterly, semiannual or annual reports to determine if a project is meeting its goals and objectives. Include clawback provisions to be implemented if projections aren't met.
6. The overall well-being of residents, including social service agencies that provide services be considered a vital component of any public financing project. When a developer benefits, so should the community at large.

Social and economic justice

7. Place high value on quality-of-life indicators, such as access to different modes of transportation, environmentally sustainable construction, low- and moderate-income housing, workforce preparedness, second chance programs, hiring veterans, MBE/WBE.
8. Require a creative Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), typically a contractual part of any public financial incentive agreement, such as TIF, that spells out specific benefits to accrue to the neighborhoods or community at large. A CBA project must allow voter registration and citizen initiative petition drives. A CBA also could include a significant (or annual) contribution to the City Housing Fund. (Lucas, 2019)
9. Property tax recipients are encouraged to work together and develop a joint community benefits agreement (template) to show how they can be a part of the upside of area development.
10. Those seeking public financing, including their representatives, declare city and council campaign contributions and gifts for the prior ten years.

SOCIAL POLICY

BASIC HUMAN NEEDS: League of Women Voters believes that one of the goals of social policy in the United States should be to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families and that the most effective social programs are those designed to prevent or reduce poverty.

Living Wage (Consensus at LWVUS Convention 2015 – Leagues are able to lobby in support of raising of the state or local minimum wages or adopting living wage provisions. The living wage is the amount of income needed to provide a decent standard of living. It should pay for the cost of living in any location and be adjusted to compensate for inflation. The purpose of a living wage is to make sure anyone who works full-time (2080 hrs. per year) should have enough money to live above the federal poverty level and avoid homelessness. (It does not include some basic buffers needed to improve one's quality of life or protect against emergencies). It should include likely minimum food, child care, health insurance, housing, transportation and other basic necessities (e.g., clothing, personal care items, etc.) Local Leagues should do research to determine what is an appropriate wage for each community. Living Wage Calculators is a better measure of people's need than the federal poverty line, which is outdated, having only been updated for inflation since 1963. MIT living wage calculator makes the adjustments for today's real costs.

Paid Leave (Consensus June 12, 2021)

STATEMENT OF POSITION: The League of Women Voters of Kansas City, Jackson/Clay/Platte Counties will support paid leave for the health of workers and their families.

Housing: (Consensus 1981; updated May 2020)

STATEMENT OF POSITION: The League of Women Voters of Kansas City, Jackson/Clay/Platte Counties support policies, ordinances, and programs that address the serious lack of affordable housing in the Kansas City area. The League has advocated for specific low-income set-asides for projects receiving tax abatement that these projects shall require additional community benefits as a condition of the incentives. The League supports the rights of tenants to expect well-maintained, properly managed housing with good access to public transportation, schools, shopping opportunities and jobs. The League:

1. Support local, state and national government entities, developers, community and other stakeholder efforts in developing a comprehensive local housing policy.

2. Support housing programs that restore, preserve and conserve the city core including naturally existing and older housing stock; look for ways to creatively repurpose buildings. Support preservation of existing, naturally occurring affordable multi-family rentals, as well as federally subsidized multi-family rentals. *
3. Support a regularly updated housing policy that calls for building and / or restoring energy efficient, quality housing stock. Emphasize building near existing infrastructure and facilities such as schools, public transportation and commerce.
4. Support tenants' rights with a goal of stabilizing housing.
5. Support adequate funding for city housing initiatives, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, the homeless and low- and moderate-income families. Affordable housing should be based on levels of need; in general, the standard definition of affordable housing is when the rent or mortgage does not exceed 30 percent of income. *
6. Support seeking funds from a variety of sources, for example: state and federal housing programs, grants, foundations, nonprofits, private investment, financial institutions, redirecting city tax funds (i.e., tax abatements) to help meet housing needs, developer set-asides or funding and other resources that may become available.
7. Support housing guidelines, funding and construction that addresses the needs and other support services of the homeless and low- and moderate-income individuals and families via a combination of single family and multi-family dwellings.
8. Support a city housing policy with requests for proposals (RFPs) that call for using MBE/WBE (minority/women) contractors and paying the prevailing wage. We also support the inclusion of childcare, transportation and apprentice/training programs.
9. Support funding housing programs that teach, encourage and support life skills, including maintaining property and meeting code requirements such as the Landlord Tenant University.
10. Support case management funding for the vulnerable population.
11. Support an emergency housing policy and funding to aid residents during catastrophic events.
12. Support requirements to adhere to all local ordinances, laws and regulations that govern the maintenance and upkeep of properties.
13. Encourage mixed-income development through legislation that reduces barriers to construction of housing for low- and moderate-income persons including supportive housing for very low- and no income households. This includes prohibiting restrictive covenants and inordinately expensive requirements (large setbacks, mature trees and elaborate landscaping) that prevent siting of affordable housing in higher income neighborhoods.
14. Encourage local not-for-profit or neighborhood- based developers to acquire government held properties for the purpose of developing affordable and/or subsidized housing in support of low- and moderate- income persons including housing for supportive housing for very low- and no income households. Prohibit or discourage transfer of these properties to out-of-town buyers who are likely to become absentee landlords.

FINANCE: (Consensus 1984) Support for adequate financing of city services. Support of budgeting procedures that facilitate citizen comprehension and City Council participation. Support for reliance upon progressive taxes. The following points were emphasized:

1. *Expenditures:* Among the categories used in the Budget by objectives, the League gives highest priority for support of two, “Public Safety and Protection” and “Maintenance and Utility”.
2. *Procedures:* The League would like to see the format of the Proposed Budget and the Financial Report coordinated to facilitate citizen comparison and comprehension as well as meeting accounting and city finance principles. The League would also like to have significant changes in the budget from the preceding year noted and fully described in the proposed budget.
3. *Revenue:* The League supports a reduction of the utility tax. When taxes are justified to the public, based on an emergency and earmarked for a specific use, the League supports a sunset clause tied to their adoption. The League supports bond issues for needed capital improvements.

NATURAL RESOURCES - WATER

Support of a comprehensive water policy, one that includes the public trust doctrine

STATEMENT OF POSITION – adopted April 2014

The League of Women Voters Kansas City/Jackson/Clay/Platte believes:

Metropolitan area governments should have the responsibility for developing a comprehensive water policy for our communities. Such a policy should include the public trust doctrine* in all decisions, recognizing the state’s responsibility to hold water in trust for the benefit of the citizens of the area.

The policy should also:

- Recognize the interrelatedness of ground and surface water.
- Recognize the in-stream value of water.
- Recognize the benefits of water conservation.
- Specify that private rights shall be balanced with the public interest and that the public interest should take precedence in case of conflicts.
- Consider other states’ water needs when planning on a watershed or basin basis.

The goals of the metropolitan water policy should be to:

- Assure availability of water for domestic use while maintaining minimum in-stream flow.
- Protect public health and minimize contamination of ground and surface water through appropriate waste (including waste water) management and through appropriate land use policies.
- Manage excess water and reduce pollution through strategies that include flood plain management, soil conservation techniques and control of urban runoff.

Metropolitan water policy should consider agricultural development and industrial development but these should not be fostered at the expense of other interests.

Implementation of metropolitan water policies requires:

- Data sufficient to identify problems and to make and document decisions needed to meet water needs.
- Comprehensive water plan within which alternatives may be weighed and decisions made.
- Coordination and communication among community, state and local agencies and other concerned interests, including the public.
- Delegation of specific tasks and activities, with clear lines of responsibility and authority.
- An administrative mechanism for resolving disputes among competing interests.
- Funding adequate to assure responsible development and implementation of metropolitan water policies.

*The public trust doctrine concerns certain property deemed to be held in trust by the state for public use, including the beds of navigable watercourses. Under the public trust doctrine, such streams “shall forever remain public highways” except for the overriding right of Congress to regulate commerce.

The responsibility of the state as trustee of such property is the heart of the doctrine.

Independence City Positions

1. Support of Independence City Charter (including our position opposing formation of a board of police commissioners with the exception and conditions stated in the position paper) and evaluation of any proposed amendments or revisions. (1961)
2. Support having a functioning Human Relations Commission. (3-1964)
3. The LWV of Independence supports a sound system to finance Independence municipal services and capital improvements. (1971)
4. Annexation (12-1972)
5. Oppose formation of a Board of Police Commissioners. (10-1974)
6. Support recreation programs designed and available to meet the needs of all ages. (10-1977)
7. Support services to be accessible to every citizen by means of an efficient and economical delivery system from the Fire, Health, Police and Public Works/Maintenance Departments and any other departments appropriately assigned to these services. (1993)
8. Support of comprehensive planning as a general guide for the development of Independence. (1994)
9. Support of tax increment financing as first implemented by the City of Independence, MO. (1996)

COUNTY POSITIONS

Clay County: Study of the home rule charter government for Clay County. Support of criteria for a new jail facility in Clay County.

1. The Plans for the jail must take into consideration the current as well as the long range uses and needs of the entire County.
2. All federal minimum standards should be met.
3. Adequate parking facilities should be included in the total jail plan.
4. The future expansion of all county governmental facilities should be an integral part of the overall planning for a new jail.

JACKSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT: The following positions were established by the now defunct Tri-County League, an inter league organization (ILO), after study and consensus by all the participating Leagues:

1. Support of the charter form of government in Jackson County (1967-1970)
2. Support of the authorization for home rule charter counties to provide services approved by the voters on a county-wide basis. (1967-1970)
3. Support of authority of Jackson County to enter into inter-governmental contracts. (1967-1970)
4. Support of a merit system applying to all county employees below the level of department head. (1967-1970)
5. Support of improved administration of institutions and services for juvenile wards of Jackson County, with chief emphasis on treatment. (1967-1970)
6. Support of increased accountability for administration of Jackson County finances. (1974-75)
7. Support of a continuing re-evaluation of property tax assessment. (1974-75)
8. Support of a sound county tax system. (1974-75)
9. Support the minimum standards in the Jackson County Jail position for the housing of jail inmates. (1974-75)
10. Support continuance of Jackson County Anti-Drug Tax for an additional seven years. (1995 position of Independence only as the Tri-County ILO had dissolved.)

REGIONAL POSITIONS (Tri-County)

1. Support of an adequate welfare program for residents of Jackson, Clay and Platte Counties. (1970)
2. Support of a regional plan for management and disposal of solid waste in the Kansas City Metropolitan Area. (2-1973)
3. Support of the expansion of a public mass transit system and the need to develop a mass transit metro in the Kansas City area. Locally, we support the concept of one regional authority governing mass transit in the Kansas City statistical metropolitan area. The League support provisions, which take into consideration convenience, accessibility, reliability and speed. Also importance is reasonable fares, minimal comfort and personal safety. The League supports those measures, which reduce to a minimum the disruption of existing communities and ecological balance. The League also favors the use of existing facilities and rights of way where possible.