



We Support

LWVAA Local Program

2011-2012

We Support summarizes the League of Women Voters of the Austin Area program positions reached by local member study and agreement. The positions are not in order of priority. The LWVAA also acts under positions taken by the national League of Women Voters (LWVUS) and the League of Women Voters of Texas (LWVTX). Each position allows the League to take action on that area of public policy.

I. Administration of Justice

Adequate counsel for indigents at all court levels and improved training and selection standards for the law enforcement personnel.

II. Austin: Its People and Environment

Equality of opportunity in employment and housing; well-run community development programs with frequent city government administrative reviews; criteria for an Austin master plan; preservation and development of open space and parks.

III. City Government

Form of government. Council-manager form of government based on City Charter; combination of at-large and pure district methods of electing City Council; direct election of the mayor; campaign spending and financial disclosure ordinance mandated by City Charter; impartial board of ethics with independent staff.

Planning, city services, growth management. City Charter Commission to plan for human resources; independent neighborhood groups; cost-benefit analysis as an integral part of the planning process; ongoing public input into long-range planning; coordination and communication between city departments, boards, and commissions; balanced representation of diverse interests on the Planning Commission; a standardized, streamlined, and understandable development process with proper regard for public notification, from developer application to council decision; city involvement with government and private entities in the selective recruitment of businesses in which environmental concerns and employment of Austin's citizens are considered; Smart Growth, the attraction of businesses to the Desired Development Zone and redirection of growth away from environmentally sensitive areas.

Finance. Early setting of council budget priorities; electric utility transfer based primarily on the needs of the utility, including its bonded indebtedness, rather than on city budget needs; an electric rate policy based on the cost of service for each class of user and a goal of 100% relative rate of return for all customer classes.

Business incentives in the Austin area. Criteria that should be considered by the city in determining whether tax abatements and/or rebates should be given for economic development are: amount of total investment; location in the Desired Development Zone; length of commitment to stay; demand on community's infrastructure; competition with existing local businesses; alignment with city's long-term economic development; environmental concerns; number of new jobs and related characteristics, such as health insurance, diversity, training programs, and living wage. An annual accounting of the tax abatement/rebate incentives during the public budget hearing.

Electric deregulation. Consideration by the City Council of all options with regard to the electric utility, including the sale of part or all of the utility and/or merger with other entities, along with continued operation; energy conservation programs that are cost-effective, assist low-income citizens, or encourage new or more efficient technology; greater cost sharing by customers for programs from which they benefit; more operating independence for the electric utility and establishment of a policy-making oversight board for the utility, with the powers of eminent domain, rate making, and bond issuance remaining with the City Council.

Annexation: Full consideration of annexation's fiscal impact on the city before council action; flexibility in the timing based on fiscal, planning, environmental, and social factors; continued use of fees to cover the cost of utility extensions and other capital improvements necessary for new development; municipal utility district homeowner payoff of the district's debt after annexation; strengthened subdivision ordinances covering the city's entire extraterritorial jurisdiction.

Drinking water supply. Regional planning for drinking water supply so that supplies are fairly allocated and water quality is maintained; a voluntary, aggressive treated water conservation plan that should become mandatory only under drought conditions; use of a variety of criteria in evaluating funding proposals for water treatment facilities.

IV. Education

Equality of opportunity. Austin Independent School District (AISD) should have as its goal to meet or exceed state and federal standards for achievement, attendance, and dropout and completion rates in each school in the district, and to reduce the disparity in performance among schools, using fully certified teachers, adequate resources, and community involvement.

At all grade levels in AISD: Strong education through varied curriculum; flexibility for teachers within defined curriculum; incentive-based compensation plan for all qualified teachers and campus administrators; appropriate textbooks, technology, and materials; full-time librarians in each school; active parental involvement; year-round schools; flexible learning environments, as in nontraditional schools and alternative learning centers; and programs to help English Language Learners speak English fluently and to provide support services for their parents.

AISD elementary. Grouping of mixed academic ability within a classroom, using ability grouping in math and reading and frequent reevaluation.

AISD secondary. Efficient use of counselor skills; an honors program with weighted grades; challenging academic courses; courses geared to current workforce needs; use of demonstrated competencies to assess student progress; academies or magnet programs with flexible eligibility criteria; scheduling extra-curricular activities during nonschool hours as much as possible; a tech-prep system that prepares students for the workforce or higher education; job training courses; and apprenticeship or internship programs.

Preparation for employment. Austin Community College (ACC) and AISD should give students marketable skills through a curriculum relevant to the work world; student problem-solving skills; career exploration, assessment, and counseling before high school enrollment; staff development in teaching techniques and making the curriculum relevant; a centrally located career planning and placement center; employer involvement; staff searches for outside funding sources, internships, and mentors; and adequate funding, including increased taxes as state support declines.

Career preparation in ACC. Coordinate education paths between high school and college work; offer education- and employer-supervised apprenticeships and internships; provide access to state-of-the-art technology; and communicate changing workforce needs to instructional staff, counselors, and students.

Adult education. Strengthened education programs in ACC and AISD Community Schools.

Business Incentives. Opposition to AISD's participation in any business incentive programs.

V. Environmental Quality

Solid waste. Long-range planning; use of methods to reduce the volume of waste, including recycling and reuse; and improvement of our present sanitary landfill program.

Energy conservation. Provide energy audits, rebates for low-income customers and to encourage more efficient technology; and weatherization for low-income residents.

Water/wastewater. An underground water district for the Austin region of the Edwards Aquifer; properly maintained and enforced structural and nonstructural (density) controls to protect water supplies; vigorous enforcement of water quality ordinances and laws by city and county officials; formal communication between the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the city; regional sewage treatment rather than numerous small package plants; prohibition of sewage discharge or land treatment over aquifer recharge areas; advanced wastewater treatment following cost-benefit analysis; planning for infrastructure of water and wastewater (drinking water, sewage, and storm water), to include all funding streams, with consideration given to scheduled repairs, annual budgeting for recurring maintenance costs, conservation, separate budget items for emergencies and capital expenditures, ongoing tests for water and wastewater leakage; and planning for future development through more extraterritorial jurisdiction control, fees to reflect city services, and charges that take into account how much water is used.

Municipal utility districts (MUDS). Start of the 120-day MUD review process after full documentation is received by the city; financing utility line extensions through revenue rather than contract bonds.

Air quality. While the Austin metropolitan area has complied with federal air quality standards, deteriorating air conditions could cause the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to find the area to be in nonattainment of federal standards. See transportation position for measures to help achieve compliance.

VI. Health

City and county medical assistance program qualifications adjusted to 150% of the poverty level; sliding-scale payments for health care for the near-poor; neighborhood clinics that provide primary and preventive health care; a single or multicounty health care district (hospital district) that provides care to indigent people of Travis County, that is financed by a property or sales tax, and that has either an appointed or elected board; contractual agreements with cities and other governmental entities for health care delivery to non-Austin residents; local government public education on the socioeconomic and health factors relating to AIDS.

Mental Health. Public funding for first responders, outpatient programs, in-patient beds in local hospitals, hotline/referral services, long-term care, prevention programs, and recruitment/training of staff.

VII. Library

A library system for Austin and the surrounding area that includes both traditional library services and modern information management with adequate funding (including a tax increase); community activities and meeting rooms; an adequate security system; and greater communication and cooperation between the schools and libraries. Building more libraries, first in underserved areas, and second, in newly developed areas or as large regional libraries. Funding for new technology and replacing rented facilities; and for the use of Austin libraries by people who do not live in Austin, providing that these individuals or their communities give financial support.

VIII. Transportation

A balanced, intermodal transportation system (cars, buses, light rail, park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian and bicycle routes, shuttles, and special transit) that serves the population as a whole, is publicly owned, efficient, economical, and educates the public on its use; a permanent mass transit authority and a one-cent sales tax to support it; increased opportunities for meaningful citizen participation in the planning process; optimum cooperation and coordination in the administration, planning, and delivery of services among agencies that perform transportation services; ongoing independent performance reviews of those agencies by the Austin Transportation Study; and integration of land-use planning and mixed-use development with transportation planning and goals.

Air quality. Measures that will help the Austin metropolitan area meet federal air quality standards, including car pools, vanpools, buses, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, bicycles, trip reduction, walking, conversion to natural gas and more refueling centers, recharge centers for electric cars, light rail, telecommuting, home employment, and vehicle inspection.

Funding. An efficient system based on a balance of transportation modes, cost-saving practices, aggressive maintenance, and technical innovation. Funding from governmental gasoline taxes, the Austin Transportation Fee, and toll roads for city, county, and regional roads and transportation projects. Evaluation of funding sources, taking into account the following criteria: allows for faster project completion; local dollars are used to leverage state and federal dollars; an undue burden is not placed on any socioeconomic group; funds are raised efficiently; funds are not reallocated without the consent of the funding body; the balance of transportation modes is improved; the overall efficiency of the transportation system is enhanced; the burden is placed on those that create the most wear and tear; and the cost of additional usage of facilities is appropriately distributed.

IX. Travis County Government

Budget. A single budget officer; performance/program budget prepared and made available to the public before public hearings; and budget approval before the adoption of the tax rate and before the beginning of the fiscal year.

Law enforcement. Increased cooperation between city and county law enforcement officers; increased use of interlocal contracts between county and incorporated governmental units.

Wastewater management. Improved cooperation among the city, county, Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) in the enforcement of wastewater regulations.

Parks. A unified county park system organized and maintained by a master plan.

Tax assessment. Fair and equitable appraisal of all real property in Travis County.

Business incentives. Limited business incentives with certain criteria. Published related costs.

X. Affordable Housing

Responsibility of local governments to ensure a supply of affordable housing through use of ordinance-making and policy-making authority and public education. Decisions should take into consideration the impact of the cost of housing when writing policy; the need for education on the advantages of mixed-used housing; incentives to developers, such as waivers of fees and expedited permits; leasing surplus city and county property; cooperation between the City of Austin and Travis County; and flexibility in building and zoning codes in the city.