

League of Women Voters of Manhattan-Riley County, Kansas

Public Policy Positions

Updated 2007

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Government Issues

STATEMENT OF POSITION ON COUNTY GOVERNMENT (updated in 2003, Printed in Oct. 1995 Voter)

The Riley County Commission should:

1. Appoint a county administrator.

In recent years Riley County government has become a big business, requiring the staff, expertise, technology, and attention of a big business. The three Riley County Commissioners, part-time elected officials, are responsible for policy-making, administration, and the management of all county property. This includes overseeing eight departments, coordination with three regional governmental units and 14 townships, working with 10 appointed county committees, oversight of the health department, and handling an annual budget of more than \$30 million.

Increasingly, Kansas counties have appointed a county administrator as their size and scope of operation have grown -- for a total of 23 since 1974. Experience in these counties has demonstrated the value of a county administrator whose authority and credentials provide assistance with budget preparation and other responsibilities, thereby allowing commissioners to give their attention to policy making. The counties' satisfaction attests to the success of adding such a position to their county government.

2. Make every effort to schedule policy discussion and decision-making meetings at times convenient to most citizens.

The public has found it difficult to keep abreast of the discussions and actions of the County Commission. Publication of agendas in the media prior to meetings is essential for public participation. Briefer and more efficient sessions would be of great benefit to the public and would make for a more efficient commission. Changing the time of commission meetings to late in the day is important to the working people who are unable to be present at meetings held early in the day. Meetings held and televised in the evening would increase public interest and participation.

3. Give timely and wide publicity on vacancies in County advisory boards in order to secure broad representation in these bodies.

The Riley County Commission makes appointments to 20 advisory boards. Vacancies should be widely publicized, with adequate time allowed for applicants to be considered. The Commission's appointments should be broadly representative of the County's citizens.

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STATEMENT OF POSITION ON CONSOLIDATED LAW ENFORCEMENT

(Originally printed in the December 1976 *Voter*. Revised 2000 and 2005)

The League of Women Voters of Manhattan/Riley County agrees that:

1. The composition of the Law Board (Riley County Law Enforcement Agency) should reflect the implied intent and spirit of the statutory language in KSA 19-4427 that created the agency.

Background: Analysis of the statute (see below) establishing the Riley County Law Enforcement Agency shows that its language and spirit clearly distinguish between board members who serve as elected officials and those who serve as citizens at large. In specifying the manner of appointment and the terms of office, the statute identifies the two categories of membership: "appointive members" and "members by virtue of their city or county office." After having named the required members from their bodies, the city and county commissions now routinely choose to fill all but one of the appointive positions with their own members. Current practice does not document the distinction between commissioners serving on the board and commissioners who are filling appointive terms.

An opinion of the Kansas Attorney General in 2000 states the current practice is not literally prohibited by the statute. However, the League is in agreement that the current practice departs from the plain meaning of the statute, thereby creating a de facto supermajority of commissioners as members of the Law Board.

2. The biennial reorganization meeting of the city and county commissioners should adopt a resolution specifying the category of each Board member (appointed or a member of the governing body of the appointing authority) and the ending date of each member's term.

Background: The requirement for the biennial reorganization is clearly stated in the statute KSA 19-4427. In recent times the actions required by the statute have not been consistently taken nor documented.

3. The County Attorney should not serve as a voting member of the Law Board. The League supports a change in the statute that would designate the County Attorney a non-voting member of the board and would allow both the city and county to appoint one additional citizen member. At the same time, the alternating term appointment by city and county as now allowed in KSA 19-4427 Section (f) could be eliminated, thus keeping the total voting membership of the board at seven members.

Background. The League sees a possible conflict in having the county attorney serve as a member of the law board that is responsible for hiring and firing the Director of the Riley County Police Department. The county attorney is often a consultant to the police department and therefore may be involved in the day to day operation of the department, unlike any other member of the law board.

4. Funding for the consolidated Law Enforcement Agency should be through a policy of equitable taxation.

Background. The original position included the following statement: "In order to make more equitable the method of taxation to fund the Riley County Police Department, the 1972 Base Formula should be restructured to take into consideration such factors as: use value assessments, if implemented; use of police services; high crime areas; and ability to pay." (Use value assessment has been implemented.) This basic position is still in keeping with League's consistent support of and advocacy for good government.

RELEVANT LEGAL PROVISIONS – KSA 19-4427 establishes a consolidated law enforcement agency for Riley County and states that:

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“The Riley county law enforcement agency shall have seven members who shall be selected in the following manner:

- (a) One member shall be a member of the board of county commissioners of the county, selected by such board of commissioners;
- (b) One member shall be a resident of the county, to be selected by the board of county commissioners;
- (c) One member shall be a member of the governing body of the city of Manhattan, to be selected by such governing body;
- (d) Two members shall be residents of the city of Manhattan, to be selected by the governing body of such city;
- (e) One member shall be the county attorney of such county; and
- (f) One member appointed, on alternating terms, by the governing body of the city of Manhattan and the board of county commissioners of Riley county, which member shall be a member of the governing body of the appointing authority.”

Continuing the statutory language from KSA 19-4427:

“The board of county commissioners of the county and the governing body of the two largest cities located within such county shall each meet on the second Monday in January next following the adoption of the provisions of this act and each two years thereafter and shall select and designate the members of their respective bodies and the other appointive members as members of the agency.

“Appointive members of the agency shall serve for a term of two years, and other members of the agency who are members by virtue of their county or city office shall remain eligible to serve as such only while holding such county or city office. . . . and all vacancies occurring in the membership of the agency shall be filled for the remainder of the unexpired term of the member creating such vacancy in like manner as that provided for the appointment of such member.”

STATEMENT OF POSITION ON THE PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES (2003)

The League recognizes the trend for various governmental units – cities, counties, and states – to consider the privatization of public functions and services. Across the nation, there has been privatization of services in such areas as corrections and prisons, child welfare, solid waste, water works, engineering services, human resource management, vehicle maintenance, and so forth.

The degree of success and the rate of adoption vary with circumstances, with stories of both success and failure. Cost savings and efficiency are usual considerations, but individual cases vary widely, and outcomes are highly dependent on particular conditions. Some services are best provided by public agencies, while private providers may be advantageous for others.

When proposals for privatization of public services come forward, the decision-making process must be conducted openly with ample opportunity for public participation and input. Timely notice of meetings must be given and necessary background documentation provided.

The League understands that approval of the privatization of public services depends on the circumstances of each case and that the historical record is mixed. Therefore, the League believes that, as public bodies decide on individual proposals, the following requirements must be met:

- Public health and safety are paramount in any community. Therefore, water services, emergency medical services, and fire and police protection must be operated and funded through the responsible public entity – city, township, county, state, etc – and must not be considered for privatization.
- Provision must be made in privatization contracts to ensure that displaced public workers are dealt with equitably and that the provider complies with current public policies for equitable wages, federal employment laws, worker safety, and environmental protection as well as for safeguarding the health and safety of the public.

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- Contracts and agreements for privatization must be drawn with sufficient specificity and clarity to define 1) the subject services being privatized, 2) the authority and responsibilities of all parties, 3) the performance standards and criteria that measure outcomes, 4) mechanisms for monitoring and accountability, 5) penalties and sanctions applicable to unsatisfactory performance and non-performance, 6) the evidence required to fully justify future cost increases, if any, 7) the adequacy of insurance and public liability coverage, 8) mechanisms for dealing with public complaints, including redress where appropriate, and 9) terms for cancellation of such contracts and agreements, including timely notices allowing for continuity of service.
- To fulfill its ultimate responsibility, the responsible public body must make provision for establishing and funding the monitoring of performance and for assessing outcomes on a regular basis.
- Approval of privatization must depend on the existence of meaningful competition in the field and on evidence that a provider has sufficient capitalization, qualifications, and experience to perform the subject services.
- Cost comparisons for private/public sector services must extend over the near and longer term, including direct and indirect expense, and should give clear documentation of relative values to the public. The responsible public body must provide clear justification for privatization of a function or service. Such justification must provide evidence that privatizing a function or service will create a permanent, net advantage to the overall community.
- Personal gain and/or conflicts of interest must be identified and disclosed as part of the decision-making process.

Planning and Natural Resources

STATEMENT OF POSITION ON GROWTH, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN MANHATTAN AND RILEY COUNTY (2002, incorporating positions on Sidewalks (1984) and Bikeways for Manhattan (1974); printed in the *VOTER* in 1998, revised from 1989 and 1977)

The League of Women Voters of Manhattan/Riley County, Kansas supports policies that achieve the following objectives:

1. Promote growth, planning and development that assure quality of life for future generations;
2. Preserve and improve the core of Manhattan - its downtown business district, its historic buildings, its older residential neighborhoods, and its social and cultural services;
3. Provide diversity of housing for all income levels, family sizes and individual abilities;
4. Conserve energy and protect natural resources;
5. Assure multiple modes of transportation for all persons regardless of age, ability or income level;
6. Ensure fiscally sound local governments;
7. Establish clear urban and rural boundaries;
8. Include sustainability as a criterion in all planning documents and decision-making;
9. Require annexation of any new area into a municipality prior to urban development;
10. Foster timely and meaningful citizen participation in all planning and development decisions.

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The League strongly supports growth and development within the city limits as the best means to achieve these objectives. We support growth and development beyond these boundaries when:

1. It is within the Manhattan urban area as defined by the Manhattan Urban Area Planning Board;
2. It is geographically balanced and supports preserving the core of the city;
3. The cost of growth beyond existing city boundaries is borne by those who will reside, work or own property in the new area; and
4. Such growth supports all of the above objectives.

In order to achieve these objectives the League supports actions that:

1. Encourage growth within present service structures;
2. Discourage sprawl and encourage in-fill;
3. Require that developers bear the costs of growth beyond existing city boundaries;
4. Enforce existing codes and regulations;
5. Adhere to all existing master plans and regularly update the plans to incorporate current values and priorities of citizens;
6. Ensure quality low and moderate cost housing throughout the city;
7. Increase the availability of ADA accessible housing throughout the city;
8. Promote, design and provide infrastructure, such as sidewalks, bikeways and public transit, that enable mobility for all who live, work or visit the city;

Wherever possible, public sidewalks should be installed on both sides of all local, collector, and arterial streets. Where frontage roads are constructed, sidewalks should be installed on the side of frontage roads away from the adjacent arterial or collector streets;

- a) Sidewalks should be a minimum of four feet wide and should be located a minimum of six feet from the curb on local or residential streets. Additional setbacks may be required on collector and arterial streets
- b) Sidewalk designs should be required and included with street designs in plats of new subdivisions. Sidewalks should extend from curb to curb of intersecting streets and should be constructed either at the time of paving of the adjacent streets or at the time of construction on individual lots abutting on the adjacent streets
- c) All petitions for street improvements in existing neighborhoods should include provisions for sidewalk installation or repair or upgrading. Payment for sidewalks should be included in the Benefit District for the street repair
- d) Petitions for sidewalk construction independent of street repair by 51 percent or more of the property owners in an existing neighborhood should require sidewalk construction in that neighborhood. Payment should be by Benefit District to the adjacent property owners

The adoption of a comprehensive bikeway system which will satisfy the needs of our community, providing safe and efficient transportation routes to schools, places of employment, and shopping and recreation areas is supported;

To ensure the safety of the rider the system should:

- a) be well designed and well marked
- b) provide for an education program for all citizens
- c) include the enforcement of traffic laws
- d) The system should provide the most direct routes possible using existing roadways, sidewalks, and/or contracted bike paths with parking facilities available at terminal points. A citizen's group, including experienced bicyclists, should be established to plan and develop the system, and see that it is implemented
- e) Bicyclists should have the same rights as the drivers of other vehicles and be subject to the same regulations. Funding should include both public and private sources of revenue to implement and maintain the system

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9. Promote retrofitting existing buildings for conservation and preservation;
10. Strengthen existing neighborhoods and commercial areas through appropriately designed and scaled developments;
11. Preserve green space and assure adequate open space in new development;
12. Require consideration of aesthetics in planning, including corridors and entrances to the city;
13. Ensure timely and meaningful citizen participation in all planning and development decisions; and
14. Encourage regional cooperative planning that involves all appropriate governmental entities.

MANHATTAN URBAN AREA PLANNING BOARD APPOINTMENT GUIDELINES (2005)

The mission of the Manhattan Urban Area Planning Board is to develop, adopt and update the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and to review development applications, planning and zoning proposals to make certain that such proposals conform to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Because Planning Board decisions impact the entire community, the interests of all segments of the community need to be represented.

Requirements for the composition and length of service of some boards like the Riley County – Manhattan Health Board, the Historic Resources Board, the Social Services Board and the Douglas Center Board are currently spelled out by city ordinance and/or city/county agreements. The purpose of these requirements is to ensure knowledgeable and diverse representation of the entire community. In accordance with these precedents and to better fulfill the mission of the MUAPB we urge:

1. That membership of the MUAPB consist of:
 - two (2) members from three (3) categories developer, real estate, or banking;
 - one (1) member representing the Coalition of Manhattan Neighborhood Associations – (chosen from 3 nominations provided by the Coalition)
 - one (1) member with background in architecture, landscape architecture or planning
 - three (3) citizens-at-large not associated with any of the above
2. That racial and gender diversity be given high priority in making appointments to the MUAPB.
3. That no member of the MUAPB serve more than two (2) consecutive terms or six (6) consecutive years.
4. That appointees must reside within the jurisdiction of the MUAPB.

Social Policy

STATEMENT OF POSITION ON CHILDCARE FOR MANHATTAN (printed in the March 1998 VOTER)

The League of Women Voters of Manhattan/Riley County concurs with the following definition of quality childcare, as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This group accredits childcare programs nationally.

A high quality early childhood program is one that meets the needs of and promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of the children and adults, parents, staff, and administrators who are involved in the program. Each day of a child's life is viewed as leading toward the growth and development of a healthy, intelligent, and contributing member of society.

The LWVM-RC believes that all children, regardless of age, are entitled to quality childcare. To ensure high quality childcare the League supports policies which:

1. Educate and inform families on what constitutes acceptable child care and where to find it in our community;
2. Advocate that childcare workers be paid appropriately so as to attract and hold well-qualified personnel;
3. Encourage local government (School Board, City and County Commissions, Health Board) to cooperate in making available accessible and affordable quality childcare options for children of all ages;

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4. Encourage private businesses and business organizations to include good childcare as an essential component of effective community economic development; and
5. Encourage local legislators to treat quality and affordable childcare as vital to community well-being by providing legislation to adequately assist families in meeting their childcare needs, for example subsidies for small businesses to enter into coalitions to provide quality childcare.

STATEMENT OF POSITION ON HEALTHCARE IN MANHATTAN-RILEY COUNTY (revisions printed in March 1999 and July 1994; printed in the *VOTER* in 1986)

The League believes that quality healthcare, including mental and dental healthcare services, should be available to all persons. The League has identified criteria for healthcare in the community and will cooperate with other groups in the community to achieve these goals. The League's goals are to support those policies which:

- Assure that basic services necessary to maintain optimal health are available;
- Remove social and/or economic barriers that prevent some people from receiving basic services;
- Create awareness of the need to fund basic healthcare services for all; explore new approaches to healthcare funding; strengthen support and funding for the Manhattan-Riley County Health Department;
- Promote wellness, prevention of disease, and individual responsibility for one's health;
- Reduce unnecessary duplication of hospital services;
- Encourage availability of a variety of qualified healthcare providers, for example, nurse practitioners, physician's assistants, and home health personnel;
- Encourage the participation of healthcare providers, consumers, and public health officials in healthcare planning.

Recommendations regarding the composition of the Manhattan/Riley County Board of Health, in view of Resolution No. 100196-B passed and agreed to by the Governing Board of the City of Manhattan, on October 1, 1996 and adopted by the Board of Riley County Commissioners on October 10, 1996 are:

I. Composition of the Board:

A. The County Commission will appoint:

- one (1) Riley County Commissioner
- one (1) physician
- one (1) citizen with professional competence or education in infectious diseases (DVM, Ph.D)
- three (3) citizens at large, none of whom is a healthcare provider, or elected County or City official, one of whom shall be recommended by the rural townships and live in the unincorporated area of the County, and one of whom shall have experience in rural health issues.

B. The City Commission will appoint:

- one (1) City Commissioner
- one (1) nurse, BSN preferred
- one (1) dentist
- two (2) citizens, neither of whom is a healthcare provider nor elected County or City official, one of whom shall have experience in public health and/or the environment.

C. The City Manager, or designee, as advisor and ex-officio non-voting member

Explanation:

The League of Women Voters of Manhattan/Riley County, Kansas has a longstanding interest in and concern with healthcare in the community. In 1964, after more than a year's study, the League published the results of its study of health and welfare in relation to county government and the history and function of Memorial Hospital. In 1978 the League reached consensus on the composition of the board of the Riley County Health Department and took action to implement those goals. Since that time the League has studied the crisis in healthcare experienced in our community as well as in other communities across the nation.

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In 1985-1986 community healthcare options were the local study focus. The process that resulted in the formation of this position included workshops, public forums, and interviews with healthcare providers, appearances by experts in health care at Lunch With League and other general meetings, and frequent opportunities for discussion. As a result, the members of the League gained an understanding of the trends in healthcare and the implications for the future.

In 1993-1994 the composition of the Manhattan-Riley County Board of Health was again studied. As a result of this study changes were recommended in the County resolution of July 21, 1980 which established a joint city-county Board of Health as provided by KSA 65-205 and which also established the composition of the board. The recommended changes were approved by the League of Women Voters Board in March 1994 and presented to both the City and the County Commissions.

STATEMENT OF POSITION ON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT 383 (updates and expanded studies in, 2002, 1989, 1976, 1974, 1970; printed in the December 1977 VOTER,)

I. Curriculum/Program

Because students vary greatly in their educational needs and in how they are able to learn, the League supports:

- The use of a variety of effective teaching methods, which take into consideration students' learning styles and preferences.
- The use of community resources (human resources and facilities) and partnerships with other public and private organizations as part of the total learning environment.
- Equal opportunity for participation in alternative programming, both teacher and/or community-initiated, in meeting students' educational needs. When numbers are sufficient and space and resources allow, such programming could include but is not limited to flexibility in the school day schedule, extended school year, grade and building organization, ungraded classrooms, possible assignment of additional certified teachers in the classroom/building, and gender-specific classrooms.
- Curriculum planning and coordination implemented consistently district wide;
- A continuum of services for special education students in accordance with the federal mandate.
- Secondary programming broad enough to educate both college-bound and non-college bound students.

II. Certified & Professional Staff

The League believes that the classroom teacher and professional staff are vital to student academic success and the student's ability to become a meaningful contributor to society and therefore supports:

- Competitive salaries necessary to recruit only high quality new teaching and professional staff and to retain and reward existing staff who have met and/or exceeded the highest level of performance expectations. A thorough written performance evaluation of teachers and staff should be done annually.
- Scheduled, uninterrupted instructional and planning time during the work day and scheduled professional development opportunities during the school year.
- Classroom student/teacher ratios that meet district guidelines.
- Use of paid and/or volunteer paraprofessional staff for all students when needed and as financial resources allow.
- Board decisions, policies, and administrative actions in support of the above.

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III. Meeting Students' Needs

The League believes steps should be taken early to identify, prevent, and resolve problems for individual students so that effective academic programs can be developed and provided by teachers, paraprofessionals, and aids (and with parental involvement and support), and therefore supports:

- Services and programs aimed toward early recognition of academic, social, emotional and health needs, including dental, of individual students.
- Pre-kindergarten assessment of children.
- Frequent informal and periodic formal evaluation of students to ensure appropriate academic, social, and emotional growth according to expected educational goals.

IV. Evaluation

The League believes that planned, ongoing evaluation by educators, parents, students, and the community must occur to ensure that programs (academic, nonacademic, and extracurricular) meet the needs of students and society.

Standing committees and advisory groups composed of educators, parents, students, and other community representatives should be established to research and make recommendations on programs and policies.

An evaluation system that measures the effectiveness of programs based on the District's educational goals and the community's values should be developed. Evaluation results should be reported to the community annually and should be used to support, change or eliminate programs.

V. Public Support

The League believes that the district should seek adequate public funds to achieve district educational goals with strong state and federal funding supplemented by local funding.

School district funds should be prioritized and allocated first to academic programs and second to nonacademic and extracurricular programs.

VI. Budget & Finance

The League believes funds should be budgeted annually for both short (two) years and long range district facility planning. The long range building plan should be developed on the basis of the total number students anticipated, educational goals, and financial viability. The plan should consider the use of and need for existing structures, the need for new space, and the impact of both on the community. It should also take into consideration the City of Manhattan's current Comprehensive Land Use Plan, zoning regulations, transportation needs, housing needs and patterns, and a variety of demographic trend reports and student population projections. The League would not support building additional space until it can be shown that existing building use is optimum.

Before voters are asked to approve a building bond issue, the League believes there should be sufficient information to educate them about:

- The planned educational program.
- The building design required by the program.
- Estimated cost of the building.
- Location and size of the building.
- Projected operational costs.
- Effect of the proposed building on existing buildings and program.

Decisions concerning program, staffing, redistricting, transportation, and other district needs should be based on how they meet the district's educational goals. Administrative recommendations and the board's decisions should seek to maintain socioeconomic balance of the student enrollments within the schools in the district.