

LOCAL PROGRAM

reviewed and readopted 2021;
dates of initial adoption and amendments in parentheses

Social Policy

Housing (1964, 2010)

The LWVKA supports measures:

- A. To establish safe, affordable, and permanent housing for residents of Kalamazoo County, providing for
 - 1. Oversight of the quality and quantity of the county's housing stock,
 - 2. Services needed to support housing stability;
- B. To provide for rapid re-housing of residents who lose their housing and are rendered homeless;
- C. To eliminate homelessness;
- D. To prevent and respond to housing discrimination.

Education (1972, 1982, 2004, 2016)

- A. Comprehensive curriculum development and evaluation in Kalamazoo County's public schools.
 - 1. The League of Women Voters supports school policies and appropriate budgeting which provide for:
 - a. Assessment and evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum (it is expected that students, teachers, parents, administrators, university subject specialists, and other members of the community as well as the public schools' research and evaluation units would be integrally involved in this process).
 - b. Vigorous experimentation in curriculum involving certified staff as well as non-certified professional and volunteer resource people who have particular skills and expertise.
 - 2. We support, as components of the curriculum-making process:
 - a. Provision for decision-making and accountability for curricular change at the building level for elementary schools (at that level, teachers, parents and students would have the best opportunity to contribute ideas and to become involved in school programs);
 - b. Designation of department heads at the secondary level with substantial released time to encourage, guide and lead in the development of new courses and the evaluation of current courses.
 - 3. We support the provisions of substantial released time and in-service training for teachers and department heads to develop and implement curriculum which will reflect the changing needs of the community. In-service training should be available to all teachers in order to communicate and implement innovative ideas in education. We believe such training would result in a more effective and responsive curriculum.

- B. Recognizing that the local School Board is responsible for final approval of the School System Operating Budget, the League of Voters of the Kalamazoo Area supports the incorporation of the following procedures in the development of this budget:
1. The Board should actively solicit and receive recommendations relating to community educational needs and methods of financing from interested and affected groups and individuals in the community, including school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and citizens' advisory groups; and from others who have expert knowledge of educational needs and methods of financing.
 2. The Board should continually evaluate the effectiveness and quality of its educational program, and set priorities which reflect both the concern for quality and the community's ability and willingness to pay for education.
 3. The Board should examine all available and appropriate sources of funding for operations of the school system, and receive an accurate assessment of the level of funding which might be obtained from each source to meet budgeted revenue needs.
 4. The Board should carefully examine present management of funds, resources and facilities and the possibility of improving the cost effectiveness and efficiency of present management practices.
 5. The Board should take into account any special conditions of economic distress within the community which might have an impact on citizens' willingness to support local financing of public education.
 6. The Board should examine the effects of various budget proposals on educational services and programs available to all categories of students.
- C. Further, the League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area supports the adoption of a School System Operating Budget which:
1. Is adequate to provide a good education to all groups of students in the system, as defined by community educational needs and state educational requirements.
 2. Incorporates realistic estimates of revenue and expenditures.
 3. Reflects efficient and productive management practices.
 4. Reflects the effort to cooperate with other school districts to reduce duplication of facilities and programs for the benefit of all students.
- D. The League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area supports adoption of policies and procedures that ensure the safety of children and adults in the school environment. This includes:
1. Establish disciplinary policies that use restorative practices to determine consequences for aggressive verbal or physical behavior of adults or students.
 2. Ensure that all adults who provide services within the school environment have background check histories free from violence.
 3. Develop and use clear and easily accessed processes for handling grievances of students and adults.

4. Provide public reporting of policies and aggregated outcomes of disputes.

Natural Resources

Land Use Planning (1972, 1995, 2004, 2015)

LWVKA, recognizing that land is a finite resource, not just a commodity, believes that land ownership, whether public or private, implies responsibilities of stewardship.

A. Planning Development

1. The League supports the development of:
 - a. A comprehensive plan for the County of Kalamazoo, with input from each township, village and city;
 - b. A land use plan and zoning ordinance for every local unit in the County.

There should be representative citizen involvement at all stages of these plans and ordinances.

2. Land use plans and zoning ordinances should reflect:
 - a. Ecological concerns, e.g., fitness of physical terrain (rock-sand strata, oil), water conditions (ground water, surface water, drainage), elevation, flora and fauna (see also position on "Management of the Kalamazoo River");
 - b. Physical environmental concerns, e.g., noise, air, water, land and light pollution, provisions for open space and waste disposal, aesthetic standards and balanced transportation systems;
 - c. Preference for redevelopment of previously developed areas over undeveloped areas..
 - d. Social environmental concerns, e.g., dispersal of low and moderate income residential neighborhoods in local units and throughout the county; proximity of residential areas to transportation, employment, parks and recreation; encouragement of social, racial and economic heterogeneity within neighborhoods; avoidance of physical barriers that by intrusions cause fragmentation of existing neighborhoods (see also positions on "Parks and Recreation" and "Housing");
 - e. Balance between particular and general community interests.

B. Planning Implementation

1. Once a comprehensive plan has been formulated and adopted, the local government should assume an active role in implementing and enforcing the plan consistently.
2. Appointments to planning boards and commissions should be representative of the diverse interests within the community.
3. Site plan review to include independent ecological review.

C. Modification of Comprehensive Plans or Zoning Ordinances

1. A change in the plan or zoning should be made only after careful study of the proposal has shown it to be consistent with the goals of the plan and of exceptional merit.

2. Hearings on proposed changes in the comprehensive plan or zoning ordinances should be widely publicized by the local government well ahead of time so that all concerned citizens may participate.
 3. In making decisions, planning boards and commissions should consider the values and needs of those most directly affected, needs of the community at large, and advances in information and technology which will address ecological, physical environmental and social environmental concerns.
- D. Role of the County in Planning—The League supports increased authority for the County in developing and enforcing a comprehensive plan. At a minimum, we support voluntary planning cooperation among governmental units.

Parks and Recreation (1971, 1977, 1983, 2004)

Since recreation contributes to the physical and mental health of our citizens, the League supports the development of a coordinated, well-balanced, and geographically distributed system of parks and recreational facilities within Kalamazoo County.

A. Planning and Coordination of Systems. The League recommends that:

1. Units of government at all levels within the County develop and maintain parks and recreational facilities to serve all Parks and people, coordinating plans through the Kalamazoo Metropolitan Planning Commission and the County Parks Commission;
2. Citizens participate in planning, development and evaluation of parks and recreational programs;
3. Park commissions and boards cooperate with school systems in developing recreational programs which make optimal use of school sites;
4. Open space be acquired to meet future park and recreation needs;
5. The County Park Commission acquire and develop park land in the underserved parts of Kalamazoo County.
6. Emphasis be placed on natural area preservation.

B. Development and Maintenance of Parks. The League recommends that:

1. Development should maintain natural features of the land and allow for flexibility;
2. Provision should be made for adequate maintenance and supervision; volunteer programs for parks maintenance should be encouraged;
3. Operations should be funded primarily from public funds and minimally from users fees;
4. Neighborhood parks should be provided as well as larger, more comprehensive parks.

C. Recreational Programs. The League recommends that:

1. Programs be planned and provided to meet a wide diversity of needs and interests;
2. Special provisions be made for those least able to provide their own recreation.

Management of the Kalamazoo River (1971, 1991, 1995, 2004)

The League favors:

1. Support of measures to preserve, protect and restore the Kalamazoo River and its tributaries as a natural resource, while developing it for community needs;
2. Support for formulating and implementing a comprehensive river plan. Such a plan would allow the developing of the river for a variety of uses while preserving or restoring its natural state. Specifically, we:
 - a. Support the use of flood plain zoning
 - b. Support land-use decisions and land management techniques such as riparian buffers and streambank stabilization which enhance river water quality and protect the river from point and non-point sources of siltation and pollution.
 - c. Oppose extensive channelization to deepen, widen and straighten the river.

Preservation of Natural Areas (2006)

LWVKA supports preservation of most remaining natural areas within Kalamazoo County. Natural areas are undisturbed or reclaimed land generally with diverse biota which may still include native species. They are not heavily used by human beings. Some are quite small, while others encompass large areas. They provide benefits to human beings as part of the natural world:

- space for passive recreation
- aesthetic sensory benefits (sight, sound, smell, and touch)
- mental health benefits through physical and spiritual connections with nature
- air and water pollution mitigation
- noise and light pollution reduction
- habitat for both flora and fauna

The responsibility for stewardship and preservation of natural areas is shared among government agencies at all levels, property owners, and users of the areas:

- local governments—provide care for natural areas within public properties; planning and zoning with specified proportions of green space; sponsorship and identification of programs to encourage stewardship by private property owners
- intergovernmental cooperation—contribute consistent plans for contiguous habitats in different jurisdictions
- private property owners—maintain natural areas under enabling government programs and cooperative agreements
- users—respect the gifts of nature and the rights of the property owner, whether public or private; appreciate the fragility of life and the need to handle it with care; treat the property of others with consideration

County and local governments should take these actions:

- provide opportunity for public input early in the process of all land use decisions affecting natural areas; publicize upcoming projects
- develop a county-wide natural areas plan, including location and size of areas to be preserved; set standards for acceptable proportions of natural and developed areas within neighborhoods, cities and townships
- promote programs that encourage preservation of natural areas by
 - purchase of development rights

- transfer of development rights
- tax policy favoring natural areas
- support for nongovernmental organizations that demonstrate, teach and develop natural landscaping in residential and recreational spaces
- coordination with land conservancies and similar organizations that preserve open space
- planning for alternative development patterns, such as cluster and planned-unit developments, which recognize, promote and reinforce the desirable attractiveness and economic benefits of closely associated natural and developed areas

Government

Providing Government Services in Kalamazoo County (1976, 1991, 2008)

The League of Women Voters supports:

- A. Full cooperation among governmental units;
- B. Public services delivery systems in Kalamazoo County which are:
 1. In the best interests of the community as a whole;
 2. Feasible to implement;
 3. Accountable to residents

When judging whether a system meets these criteria, the following areas should be assessed:

- a. Administrative systems (e.g., flexible, responsive, sound)
- b. Funding mechanisms (e.g., adequate, equitable, stable)
- c. Resource management (e.g., less duplication, cost-effective, efficient)
- d. Service quality (e.g., accessible, effective, adequate, affordable).

Library Services and Governance (1976, 1984, 1991, 2004, 2008)

The League of Women Voters:

- A. Believes that every resident in Kalamazoo County should have access to public library services;
- B. Recommends that unserved townships provide increased library service by contracting with existing libraries;
- C. Supports the District Library form of governance

Financing Local Government Services (1970, 1990, 2004)

The League of Women Voters favors:

- A. Measures to develop an adequate, equitable and flexible local fiscal system which is:
 1. Based on ability to pay; and
 2. Easily administered at a minimal cost.

- B. Measures which enable the local units of government to secure additional funds for needed facilities and services by:
 - 1. Levying a city income tax; and/or
 - 2. Issuing municipal bonds for capital improvements; and/or
 - 3. Consolidating services.
- C. Measures to improve and reform the procedures of property assessment and tax administration.
- D. Encouragement of payments in lieu of taxes by public and private tax-exempt institutions which require public services.

Local Government Election Process (1998, 2004, 2008, 2017)

The League of Women Voters supports measures to ensure that local government is accessible to all its residents and responsive to their needs, carries out its functions in an ethical, effective, and efficient manner, provides creative and constructive leadership in resolving both local and regional issues, and pursues policies that promote the physical, economic, and cultural well-being of the jurisdiction as a whole.

The LWV supports an election process that:

- Fosters an active discussion of issues and ideas
- Encourages qualified candidates representing the diversity of the community to seek public office
- Enhances voter participation in the electoral process
- Promotes political equality among all residents
- Results in a local government that considers the well-being of the entire jurisdiction and is responsive to the needs of its residents