



## **2022 Legislative Priorities**

**Sales Tax** – Current statutes limit municipal sales taxes to specific uses and amounts. For most municipalities in St. Louis County the maximum sales tax rate is 1.75%. For those municipalities with fire departments, the maximum rate is 2.25%. Statutes also allows a public safety sales tax up to 0.5% for the cities of Eureka and Rock Hill. In 2021, SB 123 was introduced which would authorize any taxing jurisdiction to impose one or more sales taxes for purposes to be designated by the taxing jurisdiction, provided that the total combined rate of local sales taxes imposed by a taxing entity that is a municipality shall not exceed 5.0%; the total combined rate of local sales taxes imposed by a county shall not exceed 5.0%; and for all other taxing jurisdictions, the total combined rate of sales taxes in any given taxing jurisdiction shall not exceed 3.25%.

**Policy** - The League supports legislation that would simplify the sales tax statutes and allow municipalities the flexibility to designate sales tax use, subject to voter approval.

**High-Speed Internet Overlay District** – In 2021, SB 108 was introduced and attached to HB 271 which passed and was signed by the Governor. The bill authorizes two or more municipalities to form a broadband infrastructure improvement district for the delivery of broadband internet service and requires the district to enter into a partnership with an internet service provider, that will own and operate the network. The League supports broadband improvement districts, but believes the amended version, incorporated in HB 271 is unconstitutional, allowing the publicly built network to be owned and operated by a for-profit service provider.

**Policy** - The League urges the legislature to pass legislation that would allow the district to own and operate the fiber network in addition to allowing two or more municipalities, counties and school districts to form a broadband infrastructure improvement district for the delivery of broadband internet service to their resident. In addition, a state proposed \$400 million plan to improve broadband infrastructure needs to support any municipal broadband access effort and include not just rural access, but statewide access, with access defined at speeds great enough to accommodate the modern healthcare and educational needs, as well as businesses and economic opportunities.

**Public Safety and Court Reform** - Public safety and the general welfare of the people are the foundations upon which governments were founded. Municipal leaders support these principles by providing public safety services and preserving order, maintaining public property, ensuring recreational needs are met, managing land uses, creating an environment conducive to commerce, and providing for the funding and administration of local government efforts. Other key initiatives of municipal governments are to preserve property values, safeguard the environment, ensure reliable utilities, and create pathways for progress for individuals, families, and businesses.

Most residents view public safety as the preeminent responsibility of local governments. This includes 24/7 emergency services such as police, fire and EMS and the courts. In addition, nonemergency services that lead to long term safety must be supported. These include building codes, nuisance abatement, drug use prevention, incentives to maintain properties, flood protection to name a few. The flexibility to utilize new technologies and assess new and old for sustainability will also improve safety and should increase efficiencies in many instances.

Senate Bill 5, passed in 2015, which prohibits municipal courts from imposing penalties on defendants who fail to appear in court (RSMO 479.360(6)) continues to be a concern. Restoration of the authority of municipal courts to induce compliance with bench warrants for the failure to appear is essential to an effective municipal court system.

**Policy** - The League urges the Legislature to:

- support cities in the creation and enhancement of local programs which will allow officials the flexibility to react to their residents needs when it comes to public safety and the general welfare of their communities.
- support public safety activities that are both preventative and responsive to the needs of the communities. The state can offer financial and planning assistance when public safety issues arise, but local governments will be the first to respond in emergency situations and need the resources to react in a timely manner.
- support legislation to provide a mechanism for enforcement of the authority of municipal courts, including failure to appear.
- support legislation to establish penalties for harassment of sports officials

**Sunshine Law and Closed Records** - Many cities maintain resident email addresses and phone numbers so that citizens can receive important updates from their local government. Under current law these email addresses are public records that must be shared with anyone requesting this information. HB 362, filed in 2021, would allow a public governmental body to close certain records if the records are related to email addresses and telephone numbers submitted to a public governmental body by individuals or entities for the sole purpose of receiving electronic or other communications.

**Policy** - The League supports legislation such as HB 362 that would allow the closure of certain email and phone records under the Sunshine Law. In addition, Missouri Revised Statute Section 610.010 Definitions, subsection (6) “Public Record” states “that personally identifiable student records maintained by public educational institutions” are not sunshine able. The League supports amending subsection (6) to replace “public educational institution” with “public governmental body” to protect identifiable student information held by any governmental body.

**Preservation of Municipal Election Date** - HB 920 was introduced in 2021 with the goal of moving local elections (municipal, school board, fire board, tax proposals) to the November ballot. When municipal officials objected, the sponsor proposed only requiring local tax proposals be moved to the November ballot. City leaders opposed this legislation for several reasons, including:

- April elections are intentionally tailored to community-specific issues such as electing local officials, local tax measures and other local community initiatives.
- There is no evidence to suggest that changing election dates for cities and school districts to November will result in enhanced voter knowledge of local ballot measures.
- Including local ballot measures in an already voluminous number of County, State and Federal candidates and questions will create ballot fatigue to the voter and may disrupt the focus on municipal ballot questions.
- Mixing partisan and non-partisan candidates and questions may complicate election ballot logistics for county election authorities.
- Much longer ballots means much longer lines at voting precincts, particularly when including constitutional amendment questions.

**Policy** - The League supports the retention of the current April election for municipal, school board, fire district and local tax elections.

## LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS POLICY STATEMENTS

2022

### LOCAL CONTROL AND ROLES OF LEVELS OF GOVERNMENTS

**Background** - The issue of local control is discussed at all levels of government. Trying to solve a problem in one community by imposing restrictions statewide can have unforeseen negative impacts on other communities when a fair, public/private solution is possible. In addition, businesses often try to sidestep local regulations by seeking legislative pre-emption of municipal oversight. This is questionable public policy and should be avoided because special interests can conflict with public interests.

In addition, legislation has been discussed to place on the statewide ballot a constitutional amendment to change the government structure of the city-county and municipalities. Residents of other parts of the state do not understand the issues here and have no stake in the outcome, just as St. Louis County residents do not seek to vote on issues in Kansas City, Springfield, or other parts of the state.

**Policy** - The League, in its effort to support citizen driven decisions, supports clearly defined roles and responsibilities for local governments so that municipal officials can effectively and efficiently serve their communities while being held to certain standards of quality and responsiveness. The League recommends that the General Assembly avoid enacting legislation to address localized issues that will have a detrimental effect on communities statewide. Legislative proposals, especially budgetary issues, should be reviewed for their overall impact on municipalities before being considered.

The League also supports local autonomy and opposes legislation authorizing statewide votes on local issues pertaining to individual or limited political subdivisions which would threaten neighborhood stability.

### REGIONAL COLLABORATION FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Background** - Over the last several years the City of St. Louis has studied the issue of privatizing St. Louis Lambert International Airport. The airport is a regional asset that benefits the entire metropolitan area as a major component in areawide economic development efforts. Assets that promote economic growth, such as airports and river ports should not be sold to public entities without a regional option to purchase the entity

**Policy** - The League supports a collaborative approach for local review and the opportunity to develop a plan to purchase regional economic development assets through a right of first refusal and full compensation to the government entity relinquishing control.

### LAND USE/PLANNING & ZONING

**Background** - Land use decisions can play a major role in preserving the investment of property owners and ensuring that commerce prospers. Whether planning a new local building or transportation corridor or changing the zoning designation, local officials must balance the interests of many parties. In addition, officials in municipalities have the responsibility to ensure that local planning and zoning laws are implemented fairly and protect the interests of residents, businesses and other important institutions that make up the fabric of society.

Challenges to municipal planning and zoning ordinances, comprehensive plans and architectural review board guidelines by special interests and businesses continues to be a challenge that threatens property values, safety, and community stability.

Another issue concerns absentee property owners who may neglect their properties to the detriment of their neighbors. Initially, such neglect may start with minor issues such as tall grass and trash in the yard. However, over time these issues may escalate to the point of which the property is unsafe to dwell in and a

haven for squatters or other illegal activity. Such nuisance properties create eyesores for neighbors and may lower property values. Absentee owners may reside out-of-state and, in some cases, may have little interest in maintaining the properties. Municipalities need to have the means to contact the owners of these properties.

In addition, cities may have added staff costs for the implementation of such a program and some charter cities have enacted annual landlord fees to recover some of the costs.

**Policy** - The Legislature should support local efforts to maintain viable and sustainable communities and allow cities the necessary latitude to set guidelines for land uses that promote responsible development, balances the desires of citizens, preserves property values, and protects the rights of property owners.

The general framework for planning and zoning responsibility has been established in Chapter 89 RSMo. Cities are expected to abide by these provisions. Cities should have the necessary latitude and support to set and enforce guidelines for desirable land uses and limitations for those uses deemed to be incompatible or that would have an unnecessarily negative impact on others. Prudent balance is the goal.

The League supports legislation that would provide municipalities with the authority to require owners of rental property to provide contact information for responding to questions or concerns about the property.

This contact information at a minimum must include the name, address, telephone number and emergency contact information for the owner of the property. Properties that are owned by individuals or entities that do not reside at that location should be required to have a local contact for the property. Additionally, all cities should be granted legislative authority to enact minimal fees for landlords to help defray the costs of a landlord registration program or other issues related to rental properties.

## QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES

**Background** - In Missouri, and in St. Louis County, municipal park and recreation programs have received tremendous support from citizens. Park amenities and programs are critical to neighborhood vitality and positive health outcomes. Our recreational and cultural amenities are heavily used, available in all areas, and up to date because of overwhelming citizen support. We believe these amenities contribute to the vibrancy of the region and make St. Louis an attractive place to live and raise a family.

**Policy** - The League encourages all levels of government to continue the collaborative efforts that have resulted in premier parks, trails, cultural institutions, and a greater sense of community pride.

## FINANCE AND TAXATION

**Background** - Technology and the economy are changing rapidly. Cell phones are replacing landlines. More goods are purchased on the internet. Services may be purchased more often than goods in our growing service-oriented society. People may work from home and not in commercial centers. These and other changes impact municipal revenues. As society changes, tax policy must also change to be fair, certain, and enjoy citizen support. Principles focusing on an equitable tax burden should apply across the County, region and State. This allows citizens and the officials they elect to produce the underlying support for services demanded and expected by residents and businesses.

**Policy** - The League supports financial and tax policies that allow greater flexibility for local governments to adapt to technological and economic changes that impact funding for core services. A new far-reaching tax policy discussion is needed with input from officials at all levels of government to design a system that moves Missouri into the 21st century. Isolated changes, especially exemptions with vague benefits, should be avoided. The League offers its assistance in this effort with the goal of creating a tax policy that is equitable to all while allowing local governments the needed revenue to maintain quality service levels. Objective analysis should govern efforts to offer state tax incentives and exemptions which should avoid financial harm to local governments.

## **GENERAL ADMINISTRATION (PERSONNEL, PURCHASING, LEGAL)**

**Background** - Public administration must translate voters' visions into viable services. For example, personnel must be hired and managed, contracts arranged, streets and public facilities maintained, financial programs managed and monitored, codes written, laws enforced, land managed, parks developed and maintained, and programs offered. Cities are municipal corporations and are highly regulated by state and federal governments. Third- and fourth-class cities and villages can only do what state law permits, while charter cities have more freedom to do what state law does not restrict. The Sunshine Law provides additional options for public oversight of local governments as well as audits, the media, and regular elections.

**Policy** - The League advocates for legislation that encourages local decision-making within a framework that promotes transparency, fairness, high standards and positive sustainable outcomes in public administration. Training is very valuable to assure that best practices are known, especially in smaller cities without professional management and sometimes frequent turnover. The League supports partnering with the legislature to foster best practices at all levels of local government.

## **PUBLIC WORKS & INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Background** - Governments and citizens throughout Missouri deserve a modern, safe, and well-maintained multi-modal transportation system along with utility services that are efficient, reliable and reasonably priced and can meet changing demographic needs. Over the years each of these systems has been developed and matured. Some components are showing their age while others are subject to mandates that do not adequately balance costs and benefits. Creating sustainable, cost-effective solutions that are equitably funded is a challenge. Many of the transportation projects we have seen in the past decades have tended to produce additional suburban sprawl while reducing population and tax base to much of St. Louis County.

**Policy** - The League supports solutions to solve ongoing public works issues and help maintain quality infrastructure at reasonable costs, including utility rates. Environmental directives from Washington, DC and Jefferson City are often very expensive to implement. The legislature should evaluate how best to meet these standards in a cost-effective manner without placing a large financial burden on residents and businesses.

Submitted by the Legislative Affairs Committee  
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