IMPACT ON ISSUES

A Guide for Taking Action
in Lincoln and Lancaster County

League of Women Voters of
Lincoln-Lancaster County

FOREWORD

This guide is designed to help League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County members determine what actions they may support regarding community issues. Each position statement was developed as the result of a focused study of an issue, involving member discussion and agreement on appropriate organizational action. Brief developmental histories of the program items and summaries of significant action are noted in the Appendix.

This Impact on Issues will remain current until program additions, deletions, or changes are made at future Annual General Membership meetings.

LOCAL PROGRAM

Updated at Annual Meeting 2024

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CITY GOVERNMENT

Promotes definite separation of administrative and legislative functions in city government; a strong elected administrator (including adequate salary and veto power); and continued and future use of qualified people in appointive positions.

City Council Salary

Supports adequate compensation for city council members.

Details of Position: Inasmuch as the League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County continues to support the Charter definition of the role of the Council which restricts duties to legislative functions, the concept of a full-time Council is not supported. Adequate salary and compensation should include payment of expenses incurred in performing Council duties plus partial payment for the time involved. Total replacement for business or professional losses is not inferred.

*Positions updated at Annual Meeting, 2024

Advisory Committees, Boards and Commissions

Promotes an open and representative system of committees, boards, and commissions directly responsible to elected officials.

Details of Position: The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County believes that the community is best served when boards and committees reflect broad community representation, particularly in economic level, geographic location, sex, age, race, and expertise.

The Mayor should assume major responsibility for city boards and committee appointments, with approval by the City Council to provide an effective balance.

Uniform procedures should be established for all local boards, committees, and commissions concerning: notification of members and the public regarding meetings; orientation of members; public notification of vacancies and the filling of vacancies; the establishment and enforcement of attendance and quorum requirements. Records of all committees, boards, and commissions should be kept in a central location, easily available to the public.

Adequate communication and attendance is necessary between committees and the public, between committees and local government, and among committees.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Supports the concept of one major governing body within the county, with the structure to be chosen by the residents within the county.

Details of Position: The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County recognizes the importance of the functions performed by county government. The state Constitution and statutes should permit Lancaster County voters to choose from several options of county governmental structure, including the option of home rule. County government should pinpoint responsibility, be accountable to the electorate, and provide efficient and modern management.

Consideration should be given to a form of county government which allows for one governing body, a single administrative head, preferably elective, and appointive administrative positions.

Uniform procedures should be established for all local boards, committees, and commissions concerning: notification of members and the public regarding meetings; orientation of members; public notification of vacancies and the filling of vacancies; the establishment and enforcement of attendance and quorum requirements. Records of all committees, boards, and commissions should be kept in a central location, easily available to the public.

Many functions and services should be county-wide, including law enforcement, planning, and environmental quality. Villages and neighborhoods should be invited to participate in governmental decisions which affect local populations.

Further cooperation between the various local governmental bodies is encouraged if it fits the criteria of pinpointing responsibility, accountability, and minimizing duplication.

CORRECTIONS

Supports a correctional system that has adequate professional staffing and city-county funding, is accountable to the electorate, and coordinated with police and courts. Supports separation of juveniles and adults at every stage of the penal process, written standards for dealing with offenders, and education to teach these standards to citizens. Supports citizen input, full use of community resources, and ongoing evaluation and research based on impersonal recordkeeping.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Supports Abolition of the Death Penalty in Nebraska. We believe the State of Nebraska should not be executing or threatening to execute its own people. Almost all developed countries of the world have already abolished the death penalty. The League of Women Voters of Lincoln and Lancaster County joins the call for abolition of the death penalty.

Our reasons for urging abolition of the death penalty:

1. The death penalty is applied arbitrarily.
2. Innocent people have been convicted and executed in Nebraska
3. The costs associated with trying and executing an individual greatly exceed the cost of life sentences without parole.
4. Repeated studies regarding the death penalty have shown that the death penalty is no more a deterrent than life imprisonment without parole.

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln and Lancaster County concurs with the National League of Women Voters of the United States and the League of Women Voters of Illinois' position on abolition of the death penalty and joins with the following states in concurrence: Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

This position was adopted by a concurrence process February 11, 2016. Additional supporting documentation available at www.lincolnleague.org.

LAND USE

Supports an ongoing, long-range comprehensive regional planning process for Lancaster County, based on adequate data and research, and involving citizens and public officials throughout the formation and revision of the plan.

Supports a balanced, contiguous growth pattern with a healthy downtown core.

Supports planned growth of urban areas based on policies which protect agricultural lands, and provide economical urban services and improvement in environmental quality.

Supports preservation and rehabilitation of older urban areas. Supports careful consideration of the effect on neighborhoods when change to commercial zoning is requested. Encourages the city to work with neighborhood associations and other groups, and to consider the effect on neighborhoods of decisions on housing, zoning, parks and recreation, libraries, streets and sidewalks, utilities, and schools.

Supports enforcement of the housing code throughout the county, where applicable.

Details of Position: The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County believes that policies and procedures on land use in this county should be designed and implemented to achieve a well-planned county. Planning policies should protect the public health, safety, and welfare of its citizens. This goal will best be achieved through a comprehensive planning process which is ongoing, long-range, and based on adequate data and research. It must involve citizens and public officials throughout the process. Public accountability requires that elected officials adopt the comprehensive plan, the goals statement, and the capital improvement program. There is a need to set goals and define policies and to update them periodically. Many tools should be used to implement the comprehensive plan. There is a need for preservation and redevelopment of residential and business areas, including the optimum use of existing facilities. The improvement of the urban design is supported. All governmental agencies such as the Lincoln Public Schools, City and County governments, and the University should be involved in a singular, comprehensive-planning process and should work to achieve its goals.

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports a pattern of contiguous city growth which is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports the maintenance of a healthy downtown core. City policy and practices should encourage financial and business activity, government and cultural activities, and professional and retail services in this area. Mass transportation and parking facilities should be provided.

In considering proposals for urban expansion, noncommercial factors should be carefully weighed, including protection of agricultural lands, economical provision of urban services, and environmental factors. Consideration should also be given to the effect of such expansion on the city as a whole, and on areas of the county outside Lincoln.

Neighborhood Preservation

Guidelines:

1. Housing

   The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County encourages efforts by the city to identify residential neighborhoods and areas of the city in which deteriorated or deteriorating conditions exist. We encourage the city to actively assist landlords, individuals and neighborhood organizations in planning and implementing rehabilitation programs.

   The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports enforcement of the minimum housing code throughout the county, where applicable, with special attention to rental housing.

   a. The appropriate city departments are encouraged to make assistance, either financial or otherwise, available to persons of low or moderate income for the purpose of bringing their homes into compliance with the housing codes and ordinances of the city.

   b. The appropriate city departments are encouraged to publicize the various forms of assistance available to bring homes into compliance with city codes and ordinances.

   c. There should be uniform enforcement of codes and assessments of penalties for violation. The Department of Building and Safety should be provided with adequate staffing and budgeting to insure enforcement.

d. The city should establish and maintain a housing data base that contains information needed for program development and evaluation.

e. The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County encourages the rehabilitation of older areas of Lincoln, and the maintenance and/or introduction, in those areas, of housing which would be attractive to persons of all socio-economic groups.

2. Zoning and Multi-Unit Dwellings

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports zoning regulations which assure compatibility between multi-unit dwellings and the character of the neighborhood.

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports:

a. Regulations which require that multiple-dwelling units be constructed on larger land parcels to insure greater open spaces around them.

b. City regulations which require adequate off-street parking for tenants of multi-unit dwellings.

c. Provisions, made either by the city or the developer, in large-scale multi-unit developments, for open spaces to be landscaped for visual effect and for park and play space.

d. Provisions for down-zoning (allowing a change of zone to a less intense use).

3. Parks and Recreation

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports efforts to provide neighborhood parks, near elementary schools, with easy accessibility for all age groups. In areas of increasing population density, provisions should be made for open space and the planting of trees and shrubs.

4. Libraries

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports provision of neighborhood library services and facilities, whether fixed or mobile, with easy accessibility for all neighborhood residents.

5. Transportation

a. Streets: The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports planning for movement of vehicular traffic while protecting the environment and the interests of the property owners in existing neighborhoods, insuring continuing social and economic well being of the residents in those areas. In low-income areas, or where it would be of benefit to the community at large to have streets hard surfaced, the city should provide paving, using funds from the capital construction budget.

b. Sidewalks: The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports construction and maintenance of paths and walkways in all residential neighborhoods to provide convenient and safe movement of nonvehicular traffic.

c. Bicycle Trails: The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports construction and maintenance of safe and convenient bikeways, providing for both transportation and recreation.

d. Alleyways: The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports maintenance of existing alleys.

6. Utilities and Waste Disposal

   The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports: (1) efforts by the city to determine adequacy of existing utilities before new construction in existing neighborhoods is permitted; (2) replacement and maintenance of antiquated utilities, including sanitary sewer and water lines; (3) burial of utility lines; (4) city assistance to low-income residents in removal of solid waste, such as discarded appliances and junk cars.

7. Schools

   The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports the maintenance of schools' physical plants and grounds in sound condition. There should be safe and convenient access.
   The League of Women Voters or Lincoln-Lancaster County supports creation of new elementary school subdistricts in District #1 only if consequent change in population patterns would conform to plans for balanced, contiguous growth of the city.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports an improved mass transportation system throughout the city.

Details of Position: The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County believes that an improved, efficient, innovative, and imaginative public mass transit system -- owned, controlled, and preferably operated by the City of Lincoln -- should be a public service offered to its citizens as an integral part of a well-balanced transportation system.

The city should secure competent professionals to manage the transit operation within the city's total administrative and budgetary framework for transportation and traffic.

This mass transit system should include such improvements as: new, clean, air-conditioned buses; frequent and reliable bus schedules; convenient bus routes; the purchase and operation of the Minibus line; construction of bus shelters and benches; and imaginative promotional schemes to increase bus patronage.

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports the use of the city's general tax revenues as well as the issuance of general obligation and/or revenue bonds and the full utilization of federal mass-transit funds to subsidize the purchase and operation of a mass transportation system. The city should seek legislation allowing highway user fees to become a source of revenue. The use of tax funds from the county government should also be explored.

Bus fares should be kept low to attract passengers, thus reducing the number of automobiles using the streets which would further reduce traffic congestion, air pollution, and the city's financial needs for street widening and repair funds.

Transit fares should not be considered the sole source of revenue to finance the transit system.

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports the installation of benches and/or shelters at bus stops where greatest use of transit facilities has been demonstrated.

City policies should acknowledge the necessity for a reliable, convenient taxicab service.

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports investigation of alternative ways to provide convenient and inexpensive public transportation.

EDUCATION

Supports greater attention to the educational needs and achievement of all students including efforts to promote better understanding of racial and ethnic minority lifestyles and culture, neurodiversity, gender affirmation, English language barriers and greater parity in educational achievement.

Guidelines:

1. Public school systems are expected to maintain affirmative action programs which assist them in recruiting qualified minority staff.

2. Staff development opportunities in the area of multicultural and diversity studies should be encouraged and accessible, with professional requirements for those staff members who interact with students.

3. In-service training for teachers and administrators and all staff personnel in the selection and the effective use of curriculum materials, understanding and respect for backgrounds of ethnic groups, and sensitivity to minorities is encouraged.

4. Public school curricula and materials should be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis, in accordance with national and local criteria, to ensure that principles of inclusiveness, respect for differences, and the elimination of racism and discrimination are promoted. Such review should also include local advisory groups with minority population representation.

5. A high quality of instruction, materials, and facilities should be maintained in all public schools, regardless of location or socio-economic background of the school's population.

6. The local system should give special consideration to the funding of programs designed for minority and low income groups. Local funding of cultural awareness programs that benefit all students is encouraged. All programs should insure parental involvement.

7. Revenue sources for public schools should not totally rely on property taxes, but should also include income from sales and income taxes, both corporate and individual, to support free public school education through the 12th grade, age not a limiting factor.

8. Higher learning institutions, particularly those that teach and train our public school teachers, should provide and support course work and experiential learning activities which equip all graduates to function effectively in a pluralistic, diverse society.

CHILD CARE

Supports quality affordable child care in order to promote the well-being and protect the safety and welfare of the children. All homes or centers or preschools providing child care should, at a minimum, adhere to standards established by federal, state and local governments.

Guidelines:

1. Child care facilities should maintain an environment and adequate staffing to promote positive social, emotional, physical, and intellectual growth of children while respecting their differences.

2. Child care practices should be developmentally appropriate and take into consideration each child's abilities and differences as well as the socio-economic and cultural/ethnic background of children.

3. Child care staff should have developmental opportunities in areas of quality care, including but not limited to, child development, effective practices, nutrition, health care, and ethnic and cultural diversity.

4. Communities should promote collaborative efforts that involve parents, caregivers, employers, human service agencies and other public entities, in seeking to identify and implement a variety of child care options.

5. Child care should be affordable for all income groups and include child care tax credits.

6. There should be training minimums for all child care Staff.

7. Parental education should be provided.

8. Local governmental entities are responsible for creating and maintaining a clearing house of available resources and information as it relates to child care and is responsible for clearly communicating to the public.

APPENDIX
HISTORY OF POSITIONS

CITY GOVERNMENT

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County has been involved with city government for many years. In the 1950's, the League supported the city manager plan for Lincoln as an alternative to the existing weak-mayor form. A "strong-mayor" plan was adopted by the city in 1959. The League supported this plan which incorporated many aspects of the League's concept for a strong administrative position.

Full-Time Mayor Plan

On January 22, 1962, the League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County proposed a Full-Time Mayor Plan to the City Council to be placed on the November ballot. The League stressed the need for Lincoln to modify its form of government to include the following: A definite separation of administrative and legislative functions, a strong administrator, and the fixing of responsibility

administratively and politically. Basically, the plan vested executive and administrative powers in a full-time Mayor, increased the Council to seven members, gave the Mayor veto power, but no Council vote except to break ties, and retained the city's directorships. The Mayor and the Council were elected for four year terms. Included was a requirement that the Mayor's annual salary, which would be set by the Council, must exceed that of any department head. In March, 1962, a compromise was worked out with the Council, providing for Council approval of the Mayor's appointments. After an intensive campaign led by the League, the Full-Time Mayor Plan was adopted on November 8, 1962.

Mayor's Powers

As recommended by the Charter Revision Commission and approved by the City Council, a proposed amendment was placed on the November, 1970, ballot which removed the Mayor as presiding officer of the Council and increased the number of Council votes necessary to override the Mayor's veto to five. The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County supported the amendment and the voters approved it.

Administrative Boards

a. Lincoln Electric System: In 1970, the creation of a semi-autonomous board to administer the operation of the Lincoln Electric System was recommended to the City Council by the Power Advisory Board. The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County opposed the ordinance proposed to create that board. The ordinance lost by a narrow margin in the May election.

The City Council resubmitted the question to the voters in the November election. They had amended the ordinance to make the hiring and firing of a general manager subject to approval of the Mayor and Council, to give the Mayor veto power over board decisions, and to permit the Council to override this veto. In view of the changes, the League did not oppose the ordinance. The proposal passed by a large margin.

b. Lincoln Transportation System: In September, 1971, the City Council voted by ordinance to establish the Lincoln Transportation System as a division of city government. Four amendments which placed the powers of appointment and removal of the LTS board members and manager more strongly in the hands of the Mayor were supported by the League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County. By a close margin, the Council approved all four amendments to the ordinance.

City Council Salary

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County conducted a study on election methods and salary (Methods of Election - City Council, School Board; Compensation for Council, Publication No. 57) in 1971. The membership reached consensus on City Council salary in April, 1972; however, no consensus was reached on the methods of election.

In 1972, the League worked with a coalition to support a charter amendment increasing Council salary to $5,000 annually. The amendment was defeated. The Council then put a "not more than $4,000" salary change before the voters in the primary election in 1973. The League supported the proposal, which passed. In 1978, the League supported a Council salary change to $5,000. The charter amendment passed. In 1994, the Council salary was raised to $12,000. The League supported the amendment.

Advisory Commissions, Boards, and Committees

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County's 1971 study Representation on and Responsibilities of Advisory Committees, Boards and Commissions (Publication No. 63) resulted in the adoption of the position in 1973. The position applies to both city and county governments.

The League has requested several times that all meetings be open, that procedures be improved, and that the Mayor's office provide needed information to the public.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

This position was originally adopted in 1970 based on the League of Women Voters of Lincoln/Lancaster County study, Lancaster County Government C What Role? (Publication No. 54).

County Board of Commissioners

Two ballot proposals to increase the County Board from three to five members were opposed by the League. State law requires the increase be made if a county's population reached 200,000, and in November, 1982, voters approved the change, anticipating sufficient population growth.

Lancaster Manor

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County undertook a study, at the request of the County Board, to investigate complaints being made against Lancaster Manor Nursing Home. The findings were published in June, 1972 (A Report on Lancaster Manor, Publication No. 58).

An attempt, based on the study's recommendations, was made to re-negotiate the contract between the County and the Lancaster Manor manager. Ultimately, the contract was terminated, an administrator was hired by the County, and an advisory committee to assist in determining policies and procedures of the Manor was appointed.

Unified Government

In 1972, the League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County requested that the city and county establish a citizens' committee to study the relationship of all governmental units within the county. No committee was formed, although the Lincoln Foundation initiated a consultant's study of city and county governments in April, 1973. The City-County Implementation Commission (CCIC) was created and the League supported changes recommended by the Commission's task forces. The CCIC formulated a bill allowing a county to establish a citizens' committee to develop a charter for city-county consolidation. It was introduced in the 1977 Unicameral legislature. The League supported the bill, which was killed in committee.

In September, 1977, the League initiated action to produce a charter. The Legislative Research and Drafting Service at Creighton University Law College developed a model charter for city-county consolidation within Nebraska and provided the League with a draft of it in May, 1978.

A group of citizens, appointed by the League, began meeting in February, 1979, to refine the charter draft for use in Lancaster County. The citizens' committee disbanded in May, 1979. The League's government committee then assumed the responsibility of developing a charter, which is now in League files awaiting further citizen interest.

CORRECTIONS

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County's interest in jails began after voters approved building a joint city-county facility in 1965. In August, 1971, the League published A Study of Corrections in Lincoln and Lancaster County (Publication No. 53), which focused on both physical and program aspects of the project. In September, 1971, the position on Corrections was adopted.

In spite of strenuous protest, the jail in the new county-city building became a concrete and steel "dungeon" with little space for program. Though two subsequent bond issues to build a new county jail failed, the League helped educate citizens in the process and more flexible facilities at Air Park and elsewhere have been added. The League has testified before the County Board and City Council in support of continued funding for the Justice Council, a corrections advisory board formed in 1983.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

This position was adopted by a concurrence process February 11, 2016. It was approved for inclusion in Impact on Issues at the Annual Meeting on April 30, 2016. Additional supporting documentation available at www.lincolnleague.org.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County published How Shall We Grow? (Publication No. 66) as part of the process leading to the adoption of the local Land Use position in November, 1974. The local membership also participated in the national land use study. The national position was adopted in 1975.

Neighborhood Preservation

The neighborhood preservation statement was first approved at the 1976 Annual Meeting.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County adopted its first public transportation position in 1967. In November and December, 1970, after a review of the transportation system study released by the city, and publication of its own study (Bus Crisis, Publication No. 49), the League adopted a revised transportation position.

EDUCATION

The original Education guidelines were adopted by the local Board in February, 1973, under the Human Resources position. They were revised in 1975, 1976, 1983.

CHILD CARE

The Child Care position was originally approved in 1977. The guidelines were first adopted in 1978. The guidelines were revised and added to in 2024.