

The Lawrence City Commission desires to express its appreciation and thanks for Legislators serving Lawrence and the Douglas County Community. We have prepared a list of legislative issues impacting the City of Lawrence that are likely to be addressed during the 2014 session. Many of these concerns are on-going each year as the Legislature convenes. Municipal governments will be particularly concerned about any proposals that would place caps on the taxing authority of cities. Attempts to erode the Home Rule authority of the City of Lawrence to determine local spending and taxing priorities will be met with opposition.

### **State Support for State Services: Avoid Shifting State Responsibilities to Local Taxpayers**

The City of Lawrence recognizes that balancing revenues to expenditures, whether at a local level or State level, is always a challenge. However, the State must recognize that shifting of budgetary shortfalls to local governments does not solve the overall problem.

The City of Lawrence strongly urges the Kansas Legislature to avoid shifting the State's responsibility to adequately fund State services to local taxpayers. City leaders should also be included in any discussions regarding the re-structuring of State tax systems to ensure that State financial obligations are not shifted to local governments or local taxpayers.

### **Local Taxing & Spending Decisions Should be Made by Local Officials**

The Lawrence City Commission strongly opposes the enactment of State-imposed spending or taxation controls or lids. These bills create an arbitrary and capricious procedure for what should be an essential function of representative democracy: elected officials determining the appropriate spending and taxing policies of their community. Local tax and spending decisions should be made by locally elected officials – not by artificial limits in the State statutes or Constitution. The city desires to partner with the Legislature to find solutions which will ease the hardship of property tax burdens on low-income, elderly homeowners while maintaining adequate funding sources for city services.

### **Transportation – Safety and Infrastructure Improvements**

The City of Lawrence supports KDOT funding the T-WORKS program. State resources are a key source of funding for cities as they face aging infrastructure and dwindling resources to protect these investments. The city supports the State's T-WORKS program and urges the Legislature to look at additional funding streams to enhance investment in the state. Additional statewide funding for key transportation infrastructure is essential to economic development of Kansas cities. Investment in infrastructure is investment in jobs and growth potential. Infrastructure investment puts Kansans to work and provides the backbone for economic development initiatives. The city opposes any transfer of the T-WORKS funds to balance the State's General Fund. The City-County Highway Fund is also essential to maintaining local roads and should be fully funded in order to support critical infrastructure needs of communities. The city also supports increasing the amount of State funding which supports maintenance of State highways within city limits.

### **Property Tax Exemptions**

The City of Lawrence believes that the existing property tax base should be protected and encourages the Legislature to resist any expansion of exemptions from taxation. The City supports the existing definition of machinery and equipment and the exemption should not be expanded. The Legislature should review existing exemptions in order to determine whether they are still appropriate and needed.

## **Court of Tax Appeals**

Municipal application costs for the Court of Tax Appeals (COTA) should be reduced or eliminated. COTA charges a \$400 filing fee for every parcel upon which an application for exemption is filed. COTA entirely exempts school districts from the filing fee, and requires non-for-profit organizations to pay just \$10 when the value of the property does not exceed \$100,000.

## **Alcohol and Liquor Tax Funds are Key City Resources**

The City of Lawrence and many community groups rely heavily on monies received from State taxes levied on alcohol purchases. Pursuant to State law, one-third of the fund revenues are allocated to the city's General Fund, one-third to the Special Recreation Fund and one-third goes in the city's Special Alcohol Fund. Resources in the city's general fund provide support for a number of city services, while monies deposited in the city's Recreation Fund provides resources for a number of park and recreation activities. A number of not-for-profit Lawrence organizations rely on the funds from the city's Special Alcohol Fund for their programs. The City of Lawrence opposes any efforts to divert or diminish the distribution of local alcohol tax fund dollars to the state.

## **Opposition to Unfunded Mandates and Legislation Restricting Local Authority**

The City of Lawrence opposes unfunded mandates which take limited local tax dollars to support priorities and needs of State and Federal Legislatures. We also oppose legislation which restricts our local authority to make local decisions. The 2013 legislative changes to the Personal and Family Protection Act have negatively impacted local authority and should be repealed to give locally elected officials the authority to make decisions about their local public buildings. The Lawrence City Commission also opposes legislation which would either make local elections partisan or move local election dates from current practices.

## **City-State Economic Development Partnerships: Building on the Success of the Bioscience and Technology Business Center**

The Bioscience and Technology Business Center – opened in the fall of 2010 – is an outstanding success providing the opportunity for several new and existing companies to grow their business at the state-of-the-art facility located on the University of Kansas West Campus. A second phase of building expansion is currently underway – providing additional space for new companies bringing jobs and the potential for growth in Lawrence and Douglas County. The facility represents a unique partnership of the City of Lawrence, Douglas County, the University of Kansas, the Kansas Bioscience Authority, Lawrence Chamber of Commerce, the Bioscience and Technology Business Center and others. Additional funding is being sought to allow this strong momentum to continue. We urge the Kansas Legislature and our local delegation to continue providing support and funding for biosciences and technology development, including support for expansion of the Bioscience and Technology Business Center.

## **KPERS Funding**

Changes to the KPERS system should be carefully considered in order to protect the city's ability to hire and retain qualified public employees. City employees are the key resource to providing high-quality services to our citizens and changes to retirement and benefit structures could impact public organizations' ability to recruit qualified professionals to public service.

## **Main Street Fairness Act**

Small businesses are the lifeblood of local communities. The City of Lawrence strongly supports Congressional action to collect mandatory sales taxes on all goods – purchased locally or through the Internet. The Kansas Legislature should urge Congressional action on this key portion of tax fairness.

## **Homeland Security**

The City of Lawrence urges an active partnership between State and local governments regarding issues of homeland security. The city's police department and our city/county fire and medical department are essential resources in providing security and safety to our community. These departments rely on funding resources that should be protected by our State Legislature.

## **Annexation**

Cities must also protect their authority in regards to annexation of property. Cities must have authority to plan for population growth, economic growth and for infrastructure expansion. The ability of cities to grow is inherent to the ultimate success of annexation powers as they are currently established in state statute. The City of Lawrence opposes further statutory changes that would limit the authority of cities to grow through annexation.

## **Ensuring Adequate Water Resources**

Because a good water supply is essential to the welfare and growth of the Lawrence community, the Lawrence City Commission has taken steps to assure continued quality water resources. The city opposes Federal and State regulatory changes to quality standards that are not demonstrably related to public health unless adequate State and Federal financial assistance is provided to meet such new treatment requirements. We oppose water transfers that will negatively affect Lawrence's current and future water supplies.

The City of Lawrence supports continued study and implementation of appropriate plans to respond to the sedimentation issues in Kansas' reservoirs. The city also supports State funding for continued research on water quality issues, particularly in light of the quality issues in the Kansas River and Clinton Lake in the past several years. Both the Kansas River and Clinton Reservoir are vital water supplies for the Lawrence community. The City of Lawrence supports increases in the municipal water fees funding the State Water Plan if such increases fund water projects beneficial to preserving the quantity and quality of our vital water resources. Municipal water fees should only increase in proportion to increases on other water plan fees for industrial and agricultural users.

## **State Support for K-12 and Higher Education**

The Lawrence City Commission urges the Kansas Legislature to provide robust funding for the education of future Kansans – from our K-12 schools to our higher education institutions, particularly including the University of Kansas. Lawrence and the State of Kansas benefits from a strong education system and we urge the Legislature to include education funding among its top priorities.