



City of Lawrence

2020 Legislative Priority Statement

Thank you for your dedicated service on behalf of our community! The City of Lawrence has a long history of working closely with our Douglas County legislative delegation on issues of mutual concern in Topeka. Please carefully consider the Lawrence City Commission’s 2019 legislative priorities set forth below.

Support for Home Rule and Local Control

The City of Lawrence strongly supports the Home Rule Authority of Kansas cities granted directly by the people of this State in 1960 through an amendment to the Kansas Constitution. Locally elected officials are accountable to voters for the decisions they make on behalf of their communities. The Kansas Legislature should not erode Home Rule Authority.

Transportation

The City strongly supports funding for the expansion of the western leg of the South Lawrence Trafficway/K-10 as well as improvements to the related intersections to improve their safety and increase their functionality. The legislature and KDOT should recognize the regional significance of this project and fully fund this expansion in the 2021 budget. At a minimum, this project should be a high-priority project for the state’s next Long-Range Transportation Planning document that will guide investments to the year 2045 called FORWARD.



The City supports full restoration of KDOT funding and appreciates legislative efforts that partially restored funding for state highway projects. State highway funds should be used for highway improvements only. The City-County Highway Fund is essential to maintaining local roads and should be fully funded. The City also supports increasing the amount of State funding which supports maintenance of State highways within City limits. The City encourages increased funding for the connecting links program. The last increase in funding for this program was in 1999 – nearly twenty years ago.



City and University Relationships

The City will collaborate with and support both the University of Kansas and Haskell Indian Nations University on their legislative issues and agendas. The City supports increased state funding for higher education in Kansas. Investment in higher education is investment in Kansas cities. Aging infrastructure and buildings on state and federal college campuses should be supported by renewed investment, improvements and facility upgrades where needed.

State Support for Affordable Housing Initiatives

The City of Lawrence has identified access to safe and affordable housing and neighborhoods as a strategic goal of the City. The City is currently pursuing various strategies to fund and find solutions to affordable housing in the Lawrence community. However, affordable housing is not just a City of Lawrence issue. State and Federal entities should partner with Kansas cities to study the problem and find solutions and tools for cities to use. The Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is an important incentive for creating affordable housing projects. More tools like this should be created for local governments to utilize. Access to affordable housing is important for seniors in Kansas communities too as well as aging in place programs. Establishing programs to assist low-income seniors afford their existing homes – such as the Golden Years Homestead Property Tax Freeze Act that was introduced in the 2019 session, should be part of the discussion.





Local Taxing & Spending Decisions Should be made by Local Officials

The City of Lawrence joins the League of Kansas of Municipalities in supporting the repeal of the property tax lid imposed on municipalities. Local elected officials should determine the appropriate spending and taxing policies of their respective communities. If the tax lid cannot be repealed, the City of Lawrence supports removing the election process under the tax lid and replacing it with a protest petition. The City also supports additional exemptions to make the law more workable.

Sales Tax Fairness

The City of Lawrence supports efforts to collect state and local sales taxes from out of state on-line retailers. The City also supports legislation to establish a program for statewide collection of state and local sales and compensating use taxes due from in-state purchasers. Remitted taxes should be distributed using existing methods and formulas for state and local governments. Such efforts will bring tax fairness to our local businesses.

State Sales Tax

The City of Lawrence does not support raising the state sales tax rate. The City does support efforts to reduce the burden of the sales tax on groceries for low income residents, such as the proposal for an income tax rebate for low income residents as recommended by the Governor’s Council on Tax Reform.

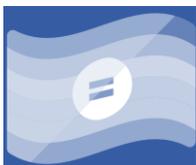


Alternative Property Valuation

Big box retailers have challenged local appraisers’ methods of assessment for property tax valuations. The City of Lawrence supports legislation adding language to the current state law that “fair market value” for non-agricultural properties does not include a hypothetical lease fee. Market value is premised on a property’s highest and best use, and not on an assumption at the outset which may or may not prove valid.

Property & Sales Tax Exemptions

The City of Lawrence believes 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. The City supports current law that exempts municipal services and public construction projects from sales tax.



Gender and Marriage Equality

The City of Lawrence supports marriage equality in Kansas and opposes any legislation that fails to recognize marriages between two people of the same sex. The City also strongly encourages the State to amend the Kansas Act Against Discrimination to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Unfunded Mandates

The City of Lawrence opposes unfunded mandates that take limited local tax dollars to support priorities and needs of state and federal governments. If the Legislature is going to impose new requirements on municipalities, it should provide adequate funding to the municipalities to comply with those requirements.

Biosciences and Technology Business Center – BTBC

The City of Lawrence urges the Kansas Legislature and our local delegation to continue providing support and funding for biosciences and technology development, including support for the BTBC. State and local partnerships of this kind are vital to the growth of our economies.



KPERS and KP&F Funding

The City of Lawrence’s ability to hire and retain qualified public employees is dependent upon an attractive and well-balanced benefit package including the KPERS and KP&F retirement programs. Any modifications to the KPERS and KP&F programs should not negatively impact public organizations’ ability to recruit and retain qualified employees. The City supports equitable full funding of the KPERS and the KP&F retirement systems, taking into consideration the liability source, the ability to pay and other matters of local concern. The State should address the KPERS system unfunded actuarial liabilities. Municipalities have to report KPERS unfunded accrued actuarial liability in their financial statements which are then analyzed by municipal rating agencies. Unfunded KPERS liability has a negative impact on municipal bond ratings and raises the costs of debt issuances for municipalities.

Renewable Energy & Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Legislation

The City of Lawrence supports public and private incentives to encourage investment in renewable energy sources. The City supports the goal of having a 20% renewable portfolio for regulated utilities. We encourage the State to work with cities to pursue manufacturing facilities for wind, biomass, solar and other energy-related industries in Kansas. The City also supports PACE legislation that would allow for the assessment of clean and energy efficient improvements to properties to be assessed on a parcel's property taxes over a period of years.



Annexation

The City of Lawrence supports allowing cities to make their own decisions regarding growth through annexation. The City opposes legislation that limits local elected officials' decision-making authority regarding annexation.



Energy Efficiency

The City of Lawrence encourages legislation and programs that encourage our citizens, businesses, and local governments to invest in energy efficiency improvements.

Mental Health Issues & Expansion of Medicaid

State funding for community-based mental health services must be restored and expanded to address the growing need for these vital services. Previous cuts to grant funding for the Community Mental Health Centers across the State of Kansas should be immediately restored. The City also strongly supports Douglas County's request for funding in the amount of \$750,000 for the Crisis Center portion of the Treatment and Recovery Campus of Douglas County. The City supports Medicaid expansion in Kansas and urges the Legislature to restore the Medicaid reimbursement rates that were previously cut.

Funding for the Arts

State funding for the arts is important. It was short-sighted of the Legislature to eliminate State funding for the arts, and the City of Lawrence asks that previous funding levels be restored. Research shows the arts industry provides jobs, generates economic activity, produces tax revenue, and enhances a community's quality of life.



AMTRAK Rail Service & Intercity Transit

The City of Lawrence supports existing and enhanced passenger and freight rail service in Kansas. The City applauds the efforts of our Kansas Congressional delegation to encourage Amtrak to retain service on portions of the Southwest Chief Route. The City supports efforts to expand Amtrak service in the state via the Northern Flyer route. The City urges the State to support the maintenance of passenger train routes and to explore light rail development in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The City encourages state involvement to help neighboring cities and counties use public transit to reduce traffic congestion on State highways.

Indigenous Peoples Day

During the 2019 legislative session, a bill was introduced that would change the designation of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day (House Bill 2009). The City of Lawrence continues to support this change and urges the legislature to adopt this proposal.

lawrenceks.org/legislative-priorities