



2021 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 2021 legislative priorities set forth below. Our legislative priorities are outlined by themes from our strategic plan.



Unmistakeable Identity

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.

Local Taxing & Spending Decisions Should be made by Local Officials. During the 2020 session there was a bill introduced regarding property tax limitations - a "truth-in-taxation" measure. The bill would have required the County Clerk to send a notice to every property taxpayer giving them a statement of exactly how much their tax bill would increase. A hearing would need to be held by the governing body for any tax increase. Municipalities would be responsible for reimbursing counties for these notice costs. This bill did not repeal the tax lid requirements and would have created conflicts with that law. The City of Lawrence supports a repeal of the tax lid and opposes further restrictions on local taxing measures.



Plastic Bag Legislation. During the 2020 legislative session, a bill was introduced that would have prevented municipalities from adopting plastic bag or single-use bag ordinances. The City of Lawrence opposes any such restrictions at the state level.

Renewable Energy & Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Legislation. The City supports public and private incentives to encourage investment in renewable energy sources. In 2020, the City of Lawrence adopted renewable energy goals. The City calls on the State of Kansas to adopt statewide

goals and a portfolio standard 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. Renewable energy customers should not be charged a discriminatory fee or rate structure. The City supports energy efficiency standards and investments in weatherization and energy efficiency, such as the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Legislation, which would allow for the assessment of energy improvements to properties to be assessed on a parcel's property taxes over a period of years. Each time a resident or business decides to weatherize a building and improve energy efficiency, it supports jobs, reduces energy bills, and cuts climate pollution.



Redistricting. The City of Lawrence supports Governor Kelly's call for the creation of a non-partisan commission to assist with redrawing state legislative and congressional districts. The City does not support dividing Douglas County into more than one congressional district.

Amendments to the Liquor Control Act. House Bill 2016 from the Special Session of 2020 codified and extended certain Executive Orders signed by the Governor during the COVID-19 pandemic, which relaxed certain restrictions governing the sale and transportation of alcoholic beverages. These provisions will end on January 26, 2021. The City of Lawrence supports modernization of Kansas liquor laws.

Funding for the Arts. State funding for the arts is important. Research shows that the arts industry provides jobs, generates economic activity, produces tax revenue, and enhances a community's quality of life.



According to the Americans for the Arts, Arts and Economic Prosperity 5, the nonprofit arts and culture sector in Lawrence-Douglas County is a \$30.8 million industry that supports 1,061 full-time equivalent jobs and generates \$2.8 million in local and state government revenue. The arts are the infrastructure of our culture. Arts organizations are like farms. Instead of food, they produce culture. The City asks that State funding for the arts be restored.

City and University Relationships. The City will strive to 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 an 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. The City supports legislation that would allow a member of a federally recognized Native American Nation or Tribe eligible to attend a public postsecondary institution in Kansas and pay resident tuition rates.

Support for Funding – Peaslee Tech. The City of Lawrence supports legislation to enable a county-wide election in November of 2021, to establish a special taxing district encompassing Douglas County, to provide a permanent funding stream for  **PEASLEE TECH** Peaslee Tech.



Strong, Welcoming Neighborhoods

Support for Affordable Housing Initiatives. The City of Lawrence supports more statewide programs to promote affordable housing solutions. Local governments need more tools to enact affordable housing measures – this is not just a rural issue.



- The City of Lawrence supports creation of a statewide taskforce on Affordable Housing.
- The City of Lawrence supports assistance for mortgage and rent support due to COVID-19.

The City of Lawrence supports statewide action on Criminal Justice Reform. The City supports recommendations from the Governor’s Commission on Racial Equity and Justice. The City supports reforms for criminal penalties on non-person crimes.

The City of Lawrence supports the following changes:

- Cash bonds (legislative changes to move to a no cash bond for certain crimes).
- Issues related to the criminalization of poverty (such as driver’s license reinstatement fees).
- Incentive based probation.

Enhancements to the Kansas Act Against Discrimination. The City of Lawrence supports legislation to codify the recent United States Supreme Court decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which held that discrimination on the basis of homosexuality and transgender status is prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The City also supports amending the definition of race in the act to include traits historically associated with race – including hair texture and protective hairstyles, language that was included in legislation from the 2020 legislative session.



Safe and Secure

Support for enforcement of local health department orders. Local units of government should have access to resources and the tools they need without restrictions from the state to enforce local health department orders.

The City of Lawrence supports local control regarding any changes to the Kansas Emergency Management Act (KEMA). KEMA was created as a response mechanism for natural disaster situations of limited duration and not health related pandemics. Any changes to KEMA should provide local units of government flexibility and local control in dealing with health emergency situations and should consider the role of cities in responding to disasters and emergency situations.



Unemployment Compensation Fund. Employer increases to unemployment withholdings will only increase the already stressed business environment. The State should look for alternative revenue streams to keep the fund balanced.

Mental Health Funding and Programs. State funding for community-based mental health services must be restored and expanded to address the growing need for these vital services. These services are more vital than ever as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown. Cuts to grant funding for the Community

Mental Health Centers across the State of Kansas should be immediately restored. The State should provide tools and programs for local governments to address growing mental health, homelessness, and affordable housing in our communities. Without a systemic plan for addressing these issues, those in need of shelter or mental health services will seek out other public lands to use, which leaves parks and recreation officials, librarians and other government agencies attempting to manage issues they are ill equipped to address.

Our community owned hospital, LMH Health, is thankful to collaborate with Douglas County and the Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center on a crisis recovery center to serve adults and children with mental health and substance disorders. Synergies like this create stronger mental health and addiction services close to home, where statistics show patients experience greater recovery rates.

Additional work needs to be done by governmental agencies to reduce regulatory, financial, and operational silos that limit multiple agencies from working together to deliver these services seamlessly to patients and their families. The City of Lawrence believes this spirit of partnership in care is what will ultimately turn the tide toward improved outcomes in mental health and substance disorders.



Medicaid Expansion by the State. Municipal hospitals and emergency medical services are challenged in meeting their communities' needs. Our community owned hospital, LMH Health, fully supports expansion of Kansas Medicaid. Providing a coverage option to the approximately 10,000 Douglas County residents who are not insured or are underinsured would encourage persons to access cost-effective, preventive primary care services. This improves health outcomes in the long run and eliminates the use of the highest care option – the Emergency Department – for manageable conditions. As a charitable institution, LMH Health provides \$25 million dollars annually in uncompensated care. With Medicaid expansion, we could see millions of dollars allocated toward investments in patient-centered care, technology, and treatment for our community members.



Resources for COVID-19 Response. The current disaster declaration cannot be extended by the Governor beyond January 26, 2021 pursuant to House

Bill 2016 adopted during the special session of the legislature. The COVID-19 pandemic will not be over by this date. The City of Lawrence urges swift action by the legislature to extend any emergency powers of the Governor to ensure that state and federal funding and supplies are provided to local units of governments without interruption. Our community owned hospital, LMH Health, has learned a lot from the COVID-19 pandemic, and continues to do so daily. In collaboration with our Douglas County partners we have educated, tested, and cared for our community during this unprecedented health emergency; and we will remain steadfast in this endeavor.

Provider Relief Funds as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) delivered much needed capital to support this care and reimburse hospitals for revenue lost due to suspension of services impacted by the virus. Support for this funding is vital to our community owned hospital, LMH Health, local municipalities, and many other healthcare entities to continue the delivery of high-quality, effective care during the pandemic and beyond.



Decriminalization of Marijuana. The City of Lawrence urges the legislature to consider decriminalizing the use and possession of small amounts of marijuana. The City also supports efforts to legalize the medical use of marijuana. Medical marijuana should be subject to existing state and local sales tax and cities should be able to levy their own excise fees and receive a portion of any state funds to offset the impact of medical marijuana.





Prosperity and Economic Security

KPERS and KP&F Funding. The City of Lawrence does not support any efforts to reduce KPERS funding or to postpone payments to the KPERS system. The State should make payments to reduce unfunded KPERS actuarial liability. Municipalities have to pay for their share of participation in the KPERS system. The State should too. The City'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.

Alternative Property Valuation Models. The City of Lawrence does not support methods of property tax assessment not based on accepted and statutory methods.

Taxation. The City of Lawrence does not support efforts to reduce municipal or state abilities to collect taxes from internet sales. The City of Lawrence opposes such measures. Local retailers should be on an even playing field with national and internet-based retailers. The City of Lawrence does not support the raising of 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.



funds for alternative transportation projects. The City of Lawrence supports use of multi-modal funding for completion of the Lawrence Loop Project, the Safe Routes to Schools initiative and the Complete Streets program.

- The City of Lawrence supports restoration of the Amtrak Southwest Chief passenger rail service to normal levels no later than the summer of 2021.
- The City of Lawrence encourages state involvement to help increase the use of public transit between Lawrence and neighboring cities and counties to reduce congestion on state highways.
- Electric Charging Station Infrastructure. The City of Lawrence supports the expansion of electric charging station infrastructure throughout the state.



Broadband expansion. The City of Lawrence supports the use of CARES Act funds and additional state efforts to expand broadband coverage. COVID-19 has shown that underserved and minority communities are the most impacted by the lack of broadband coverage and access to reliable internet services. The City urges the legislature to work with the Governor's Office of Broadband Development and to fund strategies for increasing broadband access. Broadband technology is one of our greatest economic development tools. Municipalities need the resources and partnerships with the State to expand broadband access to homes and businesses. The City of Lawrence supports policies that make high-quality broadband service more accessible, affordable, and reliable in underserved and vulnerable communities, such as the creation of the Broadband Deployment Grant Fund.



Infrastructure, Asset Management and Connectivity

Transportation Funding. The legislature should not reallocate funding from the new transportation plan called FORWARD in order to balance the state budget.



Transportation Priorities.

- Expansion of the west leg of the South Lawrence Trafficway. This should be a priority project of the State. Funding should be identified in the state's 2022 budget for this project.
- The City of Lawrence supports use of FORWARD

Emergency 911 Services. The City of Lawrence supports increased investment and enhancements to the 911 system. Cities and counties should maintain local control of the 911 system. The City supports legislation providing for flexibility for local governments to utilize these funds to provide emergency services. Recommendations from the 2018 Legislative Post Audit of the system should be implemented. Recent failures of the system are a call to action for renewed investment and upgrades to provide redundancy and state of the art technology.

