

League of Women Voters of Norman

Local Program Positions

2009–2010

Section I. City Planning

The LWVN supports the concept of city planning, with the following policies and approaches.

A. Zoning

1. Strict procedures for rezoning and stronger provisions for protesting rezoning.
2. A professional city planner and an adequate and qualified staff.
3. Long-rang planning for the location of parks and schools, with adequate access by streets and paved routes for pedestrians and bicyclists.

B. Sidewalks

1. Sidewalks should be required by ordinance in new subdivisions, except that the sidewalk requirement may be waived in industrial subdivisions, with the exception of the perimeter, if the developer can demonstrate that the sidewalks will not contribute to the health, safety or welfare of the public in those areas.
2. Sidewalks should be built in existing areas to the greatest extent possible with special emphasis on providing access to schools and recreation facilities.
3. The City should adopt an aggressive attitude in initiating sidewalk construction.

C. Bicycle Routes

1. Bicycle routes should be studied and implemented whenever feasible, with the idea of bicycle riding as a recreational activity as well as an alternate means of transportation.
2. The League also favors upgrading the City's current bicycle safety programs and stricter enforcement of bicycle safety provisions.

D. Parks

1. The LWVN supports long-range planning for the acquisition and development of new and existing parks in Norman to better meet the needs of the community with endorsement of the following policies:
 - a. Neighborhood parks of ten acres as a desirable goal.
 - b. First attention to acquisition and development of multiuse parks in areas most in need.
 - c. Adjoining park-school site development with school board cooperation.

E. Housing Supply

1. The LWVN recognizes the need for low-income

housing and supports the concept of public housing equitably distributed in Norman.

2. In order to ensure adequate low and moderate income housing in Norman, the LWVN recommends as a priority, providing incentive for private enterprise to obtain this goal, and the use of federal housing programs that allow the greatest possible freedom for local decision making.

F. Protection of land in the Little River Watershed

The LWVN believes that the Little River watershed is an environmentally sensitive area that must be protected.

1. The League recognizes that uncontrolled development in the watershed could allow hazardous pollution of Norman's water supply.
2. De-annexation of land in environmentally sensitive areas would end Norman's control over its land use; therefore, de-annexation of land in the Little River watershed should be considered with great care.

G. Public Transportation

In order to reduce highway congestion, fuel consumption and vehicular pollution, and to provide better access to housing, jobs, recreation and medical care, the LWVN advocates the development and maintenance of energy-efficient and time-efficient public transportation systems within the City of Norman and connecting with other communities in Oklahoma. Priority should be given to government-funded transportation projects that are directed toward better public access to fuel-efficient transportation and the reduction of single occupancy vehicles on the roadways.²

H. Traffic

The LWVN believes the City should provide for safe bicycle traffic and encourage a pattern of development that facilitates public transportation and diminishes automobile congestion.²

Section II. Infrastructure

The LWVN believes that a modern, properly maintained infrastructure is essential for health, safety, and positive economic life of the community. Since lack of attention over many years to Norman's existing infrastructure, inadequate planning during rapid growth and inadequate resources have resulted in a crisis situation, the LWVN encourages compliance with a master plan that would

assure citizens that all problems will be addressed in an orderly and timely manner. The plan would:

- A. Include repair, maintenance, and expansion of the sanitary sewer system and of the water supply system.
- B. Resolve current and prevent future drainage problems.
- C. Address street modernization.
- D. Enforce City codes.
- E. Be environmentally sound and fiscally responsible with bond issues presented at regular intervals for major projects, and continued allocation each year within the operating budget for smaller capital projects of highest priority.
- F. Reduce maintenance costs by replacing inoperable systems.
- G. Set priorities in the order in which repairs and improvements are made.

Section III. Municipal Services and Finances

The LWVN believes that city government should be efficient and economical, that the government should retain competent personnel, insure clear assignment of responsibility, and secure adequate financing. The following points should be considered:

- A. The League supports the concept that municipal government should supply its citizens with **basic services** that provide for the health, safety and welfare of citizens including public safety (police, fire, emergency medical service), sanitation (responsible solid waste pickup/disposal), water (safe drinking water and sewage treatment), infrastructure planning and maintenance (streets, sidewalks, lights, signalization), and community amenities (parks, recreational facilities/programs, museums, libraries), and as many recycling centers in Norman as practicable, with continued support of curbside recycling.¹
- B. **Amenities** such as parks, recreational facilities, and cultural institutions should be recognized as important in maintaining a sense of community.
- C. **Funding:**
 1. The League believes city services and programs should be funded through a combination of sales taxes, bonds, and user fees.
 2. Shared funding could include privatizing some elements of city government with retention of responsibility for:
 - a. Establishing clear criteria, oversight, and periodic assessment of how well citizens are being served, and
 - b. Making sure citizens are not losers in the process.

3. Capital needs of Norman are too massive in cost to be addressed by the general fund alone and should be funded through General Obligation Bonds.
4. The general fund and user fees collected in enterprise funds can more appropriately be used to support administration of city government and ongoing maintenance needs in sanitation and the infrastructure.
5. Sales tax revenue should be reserved for items in the general fund.
6. Some services necessary to insure the general health, safety, and well being of the community should be the responsibility of city government and must be made available even if they do not pay for themselves.

D. Adequate City Staff

Adequate staff is necessary to oversee the management, planning, and orderly development of the community.

1. Professional planners and engineers are needed to insure continuity of programs.
2. City Council policy makers must acknowledge their responsibility to provide for an adequate staff to meet city needs.

Section IV. County Services and Finances

- A. The LWVN encourages the modernization of bookkeeping and record keeping procedures by Cleveland County.
- B. The LWVN encourages the use of the county's share of road-users tax money for the benefit of ALL residents of the county, including the improvement of city streets where legally possible.
- C. The LWVN will continue to monitor the functioning of county government including the organization, finance, and accountability of funds.

Section V. Equality of Opportunity

The LWVN will continue to support effective procedures to ensure non-discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

Section VI. City of Norman Growth and Development Plans

The LWVN is dedicated to monitoring growth and development plans for the City of Norman. The Norman ComPlan was replaced by the Norman 2020 Plan and later by the 2025 Plan. Topics of concern to the League include growth management, traffic management and flow, neighborhood protection and city housing needs. The following areas are of concern, and should be monitored:

A. Zoning Changes:

1. The Planning Commission should review the policies of the 2025 Plan before accepting zoning change requests.
2. Requests for changes should be turned down if they clearly do not fall within the guidelines of preventing urban sprawl, balancing development on the east and west as much as possible, and protecting plans made for the central business/residential area.
3. All requests for demolition of property should be accompanied by any desired change in zoning, or the city should be assured that there would be no change. Demolition requests that call for changes in zoning should then be accepted or refused depending on their nature, plus an inspection of the property. The city needs to pass an ordinance allowing it to be more aggressive in removing derelict buildings and trash or trashy and unsightly items.
4. Requests for changes in zoning also should be made public with signs posted and notice in the newspaper. There should be a much larger area involved in protesting/accepting zoning changes.

B. Definition of "Neighborhood":

The LWVN defines a "neighborhood" as an area that may have physical boundaries, such as a major street, or boundaries with cultural/social-economic

characteristics; and it may be residential or commercial. A neighborhood may have a different definition depending on the interest of the individuals in it. It may be a small area for a neighborhood watch or a larger area when considering a wider interest, and these areas may overlap.

C. Development Planning:

1. Commercial development should be planned.
2. Businesses in residential areas should be restricted to those useful to a majority of the residents.
3. A new classification of "neighborhood business" should be developed, or only "special use" permits that revert to residential when sold for any other purpose should be issued.
4. Neighborhood businesses would include grocery stores, laundromats, beauty shops, and others that Norman residents might approve.
5. Protection is needed for a neighborhood when a property is sold so a business considered inappropriate to the area cannot buy and use the property.
6. New areas being developed could include plans for these "neighborhood businesses" as a part of the overall plan.
7. Care should be taken not to zone and use land that is best left for a greenbelt area.

¹ Language added to Section III. Municipal Services and Finances **A.** at the 2006 Annual Meeting: "*and as many recycling centers in Norman as practicable, with the future goal of having curbside recycling.*"

Curbside recycling began in Norman in March 2008, which prompted a change in wording at the 2009 Annual Meeting to: *and as many recycling centers in Norman as practicable, with continued support of curbside recycling.*

² New wording for Section I. City Planning **G. Public Transportation** and Section I. City Planning **H. Traffic** approved at the 2007 Annual Meeting.