



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER PITTSBURGH: PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS

Representative Government

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Support for the County Home Rule Charter. Support of a change to reduce the number of row offices. Support of an operating budget drawn upon the basis of program planning. Support of continuing the practices of an internal pre-audit, a post-audit by an elected controller with additional regular post-audits by an outside agency, and an annual capital development program plan based on long-range goals. Election of the Controller and District Attorney should be continued. Most, if not all, other offices should be appointed with possible redefinition and consolidation of some of these positions. Printed copies of the proposed budget should be available to the public before budget hearings. Copies of the adopted budget should be available to the public. Maintain a continuing evaluation and monitoring of the county government for effectiveness and efficiency.

MERGER OF CITY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENTS

The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh supports the merger of the governments of the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. Such a merger should include impartial apportionment of legislative districts, equitable representation of minority populations, consideration of employee rights and benefits, a fair and balanced tax burden, provisions for other municipalities to join the merged government, and a responsible plan to address legacy costs (debts and other obligations) of the City of Pittsburgh.

TRANSPORTATION

Support of the development of an efficient, economical and comprehensive transit system designed to encourage wide public use and lessen the dependence on the private automobile. Transportation should be considered a public service whose operating costs are subsidized as are the operating costs of all public services. A special county tax earmarked for transit should be levied.

Amplification:

1. There should be a commitment to a comprehensive plan including provisions for both mass and rapid transit.
2. Continuous contact should be made with citizens' groups and municipalities in order to inform, involve and educate the public, the business community, and elected officials about the need for and use of public transit.
3. Citizens and municipalities should be involved in the planning stages for public transportation to include, but not be limited to: development of air rights; aesthetic standards; consideration of zoning ordinances; implementation of feeder bus systems; elimination of vehicle, air and noise pollution.
4. Taxes resulting from the use of the private automobile should be shared with transit systems.
5. A special county tax earmarked for transportation should be levied.
6. Sidewalks and bikeways should be integrated into the transit system, and there should be adequate parking at major stations.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Encouragement of cooperation among municipalities and the county government as a means of solving area-wide problems.

Amplification: To facilitate the solution of area-wide problems within Allegheny County, the LWVGP favors cooperation among the municipalities and the county government. We encourage the use of local inter-jurisdictional agreements, expanding use of present county powers, and the work of voluntary groups. The expanded area of agreement on this position, which could be applied not only to solid waste but also to transit planning or any other area of intergovernmental cooperation, enables us to make recommendations relating to traffic problems, financial responsibility and consulting timetables

PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Support for legislation and policies based on standards and criteria that provide for equitable, fair, timely and transparent property tax assessment practices in Allegheny County, as guided by the standards of the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO). These include:

1. Chief Assessment Officer: Support for an independent Chief Assessment Officer, with an IAAO Certified Assessment Evaluator (CAE) designation, who has full responsibility for organizing and managing the property assessment appraisal process and who certifies the validity of the assessment roll following confirmation by an independent IAAO performance standard review.
2. Selection process: Support for a selection process that promotes independence for the Chief Assessment Officer, preferably through appointment by the Chief Executive with approval by a majority of the County Council for a specified term, such as six years. Whether appointed or elected, candidate eligibility must require IAAO Certified Assessment Evaluator qualifications.
3. Annual property reassessment: Support for an annual property assessment that assures stability, uniformity and fairness according to the performance standards of IAAO ration studies that facilitates the notification of taxpayers' assessment and the completion of appeals in the year prior to the issuance of tax bills.
4. STEB report: Support for a timely and complete report to the State Tax Equalization Board (STEB) which uses a transparent formula for types of sales appropriately included and excluded in the County's report used to compare sale prices and assessed values of properties that were sold in the previous year.
5. Adequate budget: Support for an adequate budget for all assessment and appeals operations, including trained and certified staff and resources required to provide and maintain an accurate and accessible computer assisted mass assessment system (CAMA) property inventory database supported by documented procedures that are available for inspection by concerned parties.
6. Appeals Board: Support for an independent Appeals Board whose members are not elected, who are competent in property assessment and appraisal matters and laws, and who have collective responsibility for appeals decisions.
7. Public Relations: Support for an open, understandable and transparent assessment process, supported by a public relations officer that will enable taxpayers to easily obtain clarifying information, ask questions, correct factual errors, lodge appeals, and make payments.
8. Conduct and Ethics Code: Support for all persons related to the Property Assessment process being bound by the County's Accountability, Conduct and Ethics Code

Natural Resources

AIR QUALITY

Action in support of effective air pollution control and stronger enforcement capabilities in Allegheny County through 24-hour enforcement of existing laws by adequately staffed and funded county agencies free from political pressures and conflicts of interest. Action in support of the participation of the county in regional air pollution control arrangements and solutions provided there is no dilution of the enforcement program within the county.

Amplification:

1. Effective air pollution control should be attained by: impartial enforcement of existing laws; continuous 24-hour monitoring of air quality levels; 24-hour capability to receive and act on complaints.
2. In order to ensure stronger enforcement capabilities, LWVGP supports: competitive salaries for better qualified personnel; improved physical working conditions, including more work space; provision for and use of state-of-the-art inspection equipment and techniques; sufficient funding for improved standardized training of inspectors, including in-service training as appropriate; and continual cooperation and interaction with other agencies working on air quality matters.
3. To inform the public about true air quality, the Air Pollution Index would consist of separate readings of all automatic monitoring units.

4. Recourse to the courts should be effective through: knowledgeable and unbiased judicial officials; stiff fines for violators; and the ability of citizens to bring suits against violators without crippling expenses. Governmental bodies in regional air pollution control arrangements would be free to enforce stricter regulations while promoting a uniform basic level of control throughout the region.
5. The use of mass transit should be encouraged. Municipal governments should contribute to effective air pollution controls by passing and enforcing local anti-pollution ordinances and by providing services which enable their residents to avoid the use of pollution sources.

PLANNING, ZONING AND LAND USE

Action in support of policies and practices that will protect and preserve natural resources and the health and safety of the people, that will encourage cooperation among municipalities and regional planning agencies, and maximize opportunities for citizen participation in land use decisions.

Comprehensive Plans: We support the development of a comprehensive plan by each municipality to guide elected and appointed officials in their decisions. Such plans should be administered by a community planner, reviewed on a periodic basis, and revised if needed.

1. We support, in particular, the following criteria as provided in the Pennsylvania enabling legislation:
 - a. Balanced development (including commercial, industrial, and all types of residential development) to achieve a sound economic base and to encourage social diversity
 - b. Protection of the quality of the environment with regard for aesthetic standards
 - c. Provision for community services and community facilities
 - d. Provision for efficient, safe traffic flow, including pedestrian traffic, roads, access roads, walkways, bikeways, adequate parking and public transportation
2. We support zoning and subdivision ordinances that will achieve these goals.
3. We support strict enforcement of zoning and subdivision ordinances, and believe a zoning officer whose sole responsibility is zoning enforcement must be retained.
4. We support the following operating procedures for municipal Planning and Zoning Commissions:
 - a. Official written administrative policies and procedures, including duties and responsibilities;
 - b. An established process of communication, coordination and liaison representation between the Planning and Zoning Commission and other governmental bodies and citizens;
 - c. Membership that reflects a broad representation of the community;
 - d. An orientation program and workshops provided for its members.

Parks, Recreation and Conservation:

The LWVGP supports the development of local and regional parks and planned recreational facilities to meet the needs of current and future residents. This includes:

1. Development of a master plan for parks, land acquisition and provision of recreational facilities;
2. Development, in conjunction with school officials, of a plan to expand use and shared maintenance of school facilities by municipalities to provide increased opportunities for public recreation;
3. Establishment of parks and recreation administration that provides for long-range planning, professional director, qualified staff, job descriptions, personnel and program evaluation, enforcement of park and recreation rules, and a scheduled process of communication between the administration and the community, including mail registration;
4. Reliance on some user fees as a method of supplementing municipal allocations;

Cooperation among municipalities and school districts to provide enhanced recreational opportunities for citizens, perhaps for lowered costs. This includes:

1. Development of a master plan for parks, land acquisition and provision of recreational facilities;
2. Development, in conjunction with school officials, of a plan to expand use and shared maintenance of school facilities by municipalities to provide increased opportunities for public recreation;

3. Establishment of parks and recreation administration that provides for long-range planning, professional director, qualified staff, job descriptions, personnel and program evaluation, enforcement of park and recreation rules, and a scheduled process of communication between the administration and the community, including mail registration;
4. Reliance on some user fees as a method of supplementing municipal allocations;
5. Cooperation among municipalities and school districts to provide enhanced recreational opportunities for citizens, perhaps for lowered costs.

Social Policy

LIBRARIES

Support for a county-wide federated library system.

Amplification: We believe that the library service in Allegheny County should be improved. As a whole, library service in the county is substandard. Although service is good in some areas, many others are poorly served. A federated system should offer the following services:

1. Reciprocal borrowing
 2. Return to any unit
 3. Centralized purchasing
 4. Catalogue of system holdings
 5. Inter-library loan delivery service
 6. Resource sharing, with remote browsing and printout as possibilities for the future if practical
 7. Computerization of library processes and services, including the catalogue of member library holdings
 8. Access by the public to computer terminals for use in research and to access the Internet and World Wide Web
 9. A fair method of assessing municipalities for funding needs, including long-range planning and capital needs
- Support for local library boards to serve in budget development and in an advisory capacity

SCHOOLS

Action in support of:

1. Integration in any school district from the elementary level onward with compensatory programs to supplement the process of integration but not substitute for it;
2. A capital performance budget as well as a full accounting of all funds, including federal and other grants;
3. Policies that couple sound fiscal responsibility with the highest quality of education;
4. Policies that encourage curriculum review and coordination;
5. Policies that include teacher training, staff development and use of volunteers in the schools;
6. Hiring practices that consider creativity, enthusiasm, dedication, diversity and specific subject skills;
7. Early detection of all children who need remedial attention, and support of adequate funding for remediation of all students needing it at all grade levels. A systematic evaluation process should be part of the program;
8. Guidelines on the use of surplus school space, including defining the term "surplus", and setting priorities for alternative uses and establishing rules and conditions for use;
9. Cooperation between school districts and municipalities in the use of recreational facilities and planning of recreational programs;
10. Policies that promote ongoing communication between teachers and administrators and parents and the community at large.

HOUSING

Support of a county housing code enforcement program that enforces minimum health and safety standards and promotes methods by which standards can be met.

Amplification: A county housing code should be developed that would require the inspection of housing units in the county on a periodic basis. Funding should be made available to aid those who are financially unable to correct violations of codes. Tax credits, loans, grants and use of revenue-sharing funds were suggested methods of

financing. Information concerning code enforcement and alternatives for financing and upgrading of under-code properties should be made available to the public.

The LWVGP supports policies and regulations that would provide for:

1. Standardized inspections throughout the county;
2. Training and/or certification of all inspectors;
3. Inspection of all sale properties before transfer of ownership;
4. Periodic inspection of all rental properties, at least once every 3-5 years, to verify that the dwelling is safe and in compliance with the housing code;
5. Assistance to low-income people in obtaining housing, and monitoring and assistance provided to help maintain that housing.

The LWVGP believes it is the responsibility of all levels of government to promote programs that provide adequate housing to people with limited income and special needs, including partnerships with business and nonprofit groups. Minimum federal standards and a process of accountability should be determined. All levels of government should support local initiatives, including appropriate oversight.

CABLE TELEVISION

The League recognizes the importance and influence of television in our lives and supports televising the proceedings and discussions of school board and municipal public meetings. These should be advertised widely and broadcast on local public access channels. This access should be part of all franchise agreements between municipalities and the cable companies. In addition, cable companies should provide adequate assistance and technical help and training to citizens involved in producing such programs and make studio space available when possible.

In 1994, the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh was formed through the merger of five local Leagues, each of which was organized to address a municipality or a group of municipalities. Many of the policy positions of those Leagues were merged into the county-wide positions above. However, some positions were applicable only to specific municipalities, and have been retained as the unit positions below.

MT. LEBANON UNIT POSITIONS

COMMUNITY RELATIONS BOARD

Support of Community Relations Board in its responsibilities to provide education regarding the law on equal access to housing and in respect to the rights of citizens with special needs, to provide conciliation wherever necessary, and to act as a catalyst and help to develop strategies to meet the needs of various groups including youth and senior citizens.

HOME RULE CHARTER

Support of the Home Rule Charter for Mt. Lebanon as approved by the voters in 1974 except for its provisions for an elected Treasurer and Section 1201 regarding initiative and referendum. The Mt. Lebanon Unit proposes modifications in the provision of the Home Rule Charter for initiative and referendum for the purpose of allowing adequate citizen access to decision making without preventing the municipal government from functioning effectively.

Historical background: Since its approval in 1974, four amendments to the Home Rule Charter have been adopted by referendum, all of which have been opposed by the LWV:

1. Restriction of non-electoral and lease rental debtor limitation from 250% to 25% of the Municipality's borrowing base;
2. Limitation to a 2-mill increase over previous year's tax levy;
3. Removal of the requirement of adoption of a Redevelopment Code; and
4. Removal of the requirement for adoption of a Property Maintenance Code.

MUNICIPAL BUDGET

Support of the popularized Municipal Budget as being clear, concise, detailed and informative, but with certain suggested additions: substantial advance publicity of what is proposed and how this may affect the taxpayer; continued inclusion of the capital improvement program summary with the popularized budget; inclusions of job titles with salary scales and the cost of contracting services; continued graphic explanations. Support of careful scrutiny of expenditures even in top priority areas; assignment of top priority to those services which only the municipal government can provide; cooperation with other municipalities whenever Mt. Lebanon can affect a cost savings without sacrificing quality of services. Outreach Teen and Family Services is a high priority item, and we support the pursuit of all funding options.

TREASURER'S OFFICE

Support of the following changes in the financial system of Mt. Lebanon combination of the functions of the financial office and the Treasurer's office to be carried out by an appointed official with a system of checks and balances, setting penalty rates on delinquencies and liens high enough to discourage deliberate non-payment of taxes.

PITTSBURGH CENTRAL UNIT POSITION

PITTSBURGH HOUSING

Support of an open housing market and an effective Commission on Human Relations for the City of Pittsburgh. Support legislation, at local or state level, to deal with problem of group homes and to define group homes as a residential use of property and permitted in all residential zones for mentally ill adults, mentally ill children, retarded adults, retarded children, physically handicapped people, adult offenders, delinquent children, dependent children, alcoholics, drug addicts, and victims of violent crimes and to address the problem of concentration of group homes.

UPPER ST. CLAIR UNIT POSITIONS

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Upper St. Clair Unit recognizes the desirability of continuing to broaden the tax base in Upper St. Clair by encouraging the development of the land already zoned for light industrial and commercial development. Increasing the tax base should be one criterion used to measure the need for additional development through rezoning; however the quality of life and the services needed by the residents must be given primary consideration. The aesthetic aspects of the development of land in Upper St. Clair must be continuously monitored. Priority should be given to the preservation of existing open space on steep slopes, in floodways, along major roadways and other sensitive land areas.

There is a need for a more balanced residential development to include persons of diverse ages and incomes. Additional areas should be zoned for multi-family development. Special incentives to developers may be needed to encourage opportunities for residential diversity to accommodate the changing needs of our population. Consideration of regional needs is also of major importance to Upper St. Clair. We actively seek closer cooperation between communities for planning and housing needs, public safety and ambulance services, transportation and the recycling of solid waste.

We stress the importance of providing community services and facilities for the needs of all age groups. Therefore, the Unit endorses continued exploration and implementation of alternate methods of transportation within the community (e.g. bike paths, foot paths, sidewalks, buses, etc.).

TOWNSHIP LIBRARY

Support of the Township Library as a community resource open daily with a Library Board acting as an advocate for citizen interest, adequate funding, and the enhancement of the visibility of the library in the community.

Amplification:

1. The Library should be open daily, and the number of hours the library is open to the public should be increased.
2. All positions on the Library Board should be filled, and a regular meeting schedule established and publicized.
The Board should:
 - a. Be an advocate for the library and increase citizen involvement with the library;

- b. Foster improved public relations efforts by the library staff through regularly scheduled meetings between and among the Board, staff, the township manager, township commissioners, and the public; and
 - c. Review pertinent state legislation.
3. The Township Librarian must have autonomy in the selection of books, periodicals and other library media resources. Recommendations from the township government, the Library Board, and the public are appropriate and should be welcome.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

The Upper St. Clair Unit believes that local government has an obligation to see that there is an emergency medical service available to the citizenry and that there be minimum standards set. It is not necessarily the role of government to run the service. The Unit would support increasing revenue from the General Fund if the Upper St. Clair subscriptions and user fee income is not sufficient to cover its portion of Tri-Community South Emergency Medical Services expenses.

Amplification:

1. Subscriptions to EMS should be more strongly encouraged;
2. Vagueness of most insurance coverage should be stressed in EMS literature;
3. Subscription forms should be sent earlier to avoid the holiday season rush;
4. A second reminder should be sent to residents who have not subscribed within a month;
5. Effort should be exerted to enroll new residents.

RECREATION

The Upper St. Clair Unit supports long range planning with reference to recreation facilities for both sexes and all ages and interest groups. We believe our recreation facilities and programs are basically adequate with the exception of a public swimming pool. We believe recreation should be a combination of tax-supported and self-supporting programs. We favor the concept of a community center complex. We are in favor of putting a community center complex on the ballot. The Unit supports park and recreation facilities that take land use into consideration. Any development of the Boyce and Mayview properties should be pursued with utmost care and special attention to environmental as well as financial issues, with full community involvement, and with public disclosure that is completely open and well-publicized.

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