



Platform for Action

Public Policy Positions

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF MESA COUNTY

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Nuts and Bolts of League's Advocacy: Study, Consensus, and Then Action

The foundation of League's advocacy is the study, consensus and action cycle. Before League members can act on a government issue, we first study the issue. The process starts when members adopt a new local study, or the state convention adopts a new study item for study by all leagues of the state, or the national convention adopts a new study topic for study by local leagues across the nation.

A resource committee is assembled and is responsible for carrying out the study. Information is gathered through tours, research, guest speakers, observing, and seminars. The resource committee then prepares and presents the information to League members.

The presentations finished, the membership conducts a decision making process to discuss and arrive at conclusions on issues. We call this process *consensus*.

Consensus reached by members is not a simple majority, nor is it unanimity, but refers to the overall sense of the group as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions.

At the local level, the local board will approve the wording of a position adopted after study. When a local League takes consensus on a state League item, the conclusions of the local league represent only one voice, their deliberations are compared with those of each of the other participating leagues and a position reflecting the common ground of all the leagues is developed for the approval of the state league board. Likewise, the result of a national study item requires the careful melding of the ideas and conclusions of local leagues across the country into a position that will be approved by the National Board.

Once League at the state or national level has adopted a position on a government issue, that position becomes a part of the League positions included in the State or National League book. In future years, the local league will review program positions and decide to retain or drop positions based on the appropriateness to the political times. Sometimes we vote to update positions that are not keeping pace with contemporary society. A local league cannot adopt or retain a position at the local level that is in conflict with a state or national League position.

Once we have a program position on an issue, we can take action. Because we have positions on so many issues today, we select priority areas to focus on.

--Jan McDaniel

League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MESA COUNTY LOCAL PUBLIC POLICY POSITION

EDUCATION

The League of Women Voters of Mesa County believes that:

- Public education is the foundation for the responsible and informed citizenry necessary to a self governing democracy.
- Citizens, free of prejudice, emotionally stable, accomplished in basic skills, and practiced in thinking for themselves should be the aim of public education;
- Public school education must cultivate understanding of the precious American tradition of self-government, its rights and responsibilities as well as a sensitivity to the cultures of others.
- Local districts must provide a high quality education including optimum class size, quality teachers, parental involvement and a safe, welcoming, stimulating environment.
- The role of students, parents and community is to be involved in the students' learning process.

Position in Brief

We support open communication among the district, school board, schools, and the community; a well developed and maintained curriculum; instruction that meets the needs of diverse learners; testing which is prescriptive and identifies individual student's needs; a funding level that covers growth needs, program needs, academic improvement strategies; and long-range planning of school facilities.

1. Communication Standards

- a Public Information Office to facilitate communication within the school system and provide the public with factual information at all levels;
- an accessible, visible school board, open to consideration of individual concerns brought before it;
- citizen and parent advisory committees within the district;
- community and parent volunteers in all schools.

2. Curriculum Standards

- a sufficiently demanding curriculum based on State Content Standards and district expectations;
- a development model for both local curriculum and State Content Standards involving teachers, parents, administrators, business and community persons;
- review and revision in a timely manner, scheduling work sessions at times when teachers are available and undistracted.

3. Instruction Standards



- maintenance of the current authority vested in the elected directors of school districts to control the instruction of the youth of their district in public schools;
- the use of quality time for teachers and other professionals to identify and analyze instructional strategies that work with diverse learners;
- programs and instructional strategies developed within the local district and community for students with limited ability to use English;
- an effective counseling program;
- a vocational program to meet student and community needs;
- instructional guides updated by teachers and support staff with quality time to collaborate;
- an effective and standardized system of staff development and teacher evaluation.

4. Testing Standards

- a. State Assessment Test based on the Colorado Model Content standards which meets these criteria:
 - is not a high stakes single test;
 - is diagnostic and instructionally useful;
 - accommodates diversity;
 - is an appropriate tool for population being tested;
 - reports specific data to teachers, parents and students needed to help students progress;
 - establishes a base year with complete and accurate data;
 - does longitudinal tracking of individual test scores.
- b. District testing which:
 - is useful to instruction;
 - is prescriptive, pinpointing strengths and weaknesses;
 - does not interfere with good instruction;
 - is timely, with test results accessible to people involved in instruction and decision making;
 - is a tool to improve curriculum and instruction.
- c. A district retention authority and remedial programs to help students.

5. Funding Standards

- basic school funding from the General Fund;
- moneys from the "Education Fund" used for academic improvement;
- maintenance of a salary schedule competitive with comparable school districts;
- time and funding for professional staff development;
- adequate instructional materials and supplies for all learners;
- flexibility for districts in the use of Amendment 23 funds linked with public accountability;
- fully funded State and Federally mandated programs.

6. Facilities Standards

- a master plan for building use and for long-range construction;
- adequate district facilities to accommodate both student growth and expanded programs;
- functional buildings and sites designed to encourage community use.



7. Charter Schools, which are public schools, are an asset to the public school system when:

- applicants and the district work together to meet the mission and goals which can better serve an identified student population in the district;
- personnel who will be the autonomous administrators for the charter school have leadership and financial skills and clear curriculum and assessment plans;
- Charter stipulates statewide standards as well as specific standards and includes measures to meet or exceed those standards;
- The District and the charter school rigorously monitor contract compliance with grass roots charters and for-profit Education Management Organizations (EMO's);
- The District uses the charter school as a model for in-district improvements and as a model for other districts with charter schools or prospective charter schools. (Adopted 2003)

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Background:

The League of Women of Mesa County first studied the issues of Juvenile Justice in the early 1980's. At that time youth who were arrested were often held in the county jail because there was no youth detention facility and very few services to address the needs of delinquent juvenile offenders. At that time a position was developed and adopted in 1984 that called for the building and operation of a youth detention facility for the Western Slope along with the provision of services to address the needs of youthful offenders.

In 2004 The League of Women Voters of Mesa County recognized that this position was considerably out of date and that the Juvenile Justice System had undergone fundamental changes since the adoption of our original position. At the annual meeting in 2005 the membership voted to direct League to undertake a new study of the issues of Juvenile Justice and to provide a new position for consideration and possible adoption at the annual meeting in 2007. As an interim measure the League of Women Voters of Mesa County voted to update the original language to reflect that a youth detention center had long since been built and that the adequate maintenance, expansion and support of the facility is a more appropriate statement at this time.

Position in Brief:

The League of Women Voters of Mesa County asserts that the first and foremost obligation of a community in sustaining an ethical climate and addressing juvenile delinquency is prevention. However, when youth are involved in the Juvenile Justice System they should be given every opportunity to succeed. The system must provide swift and fair judgment. Youth must be held fully accountable for their actions in order to secure their rehabilitation by providing restitution and reparation to victims and the community.

Therefore we support proactive preventative services throughout the community to address the root causes of juvenile criminal offense. For youth involved in the Juvenile Justice System, we urge the



provision of sufficient resources to effectively rehabilitate the youth, address the community need for compensation, and prevent further involvement in the adult criminal justice system. (Adopted 2007)

Preventative services should include:

- Adequate, affordable, accessible and professional mental health services
- Drug and alcohol abuse education
- Alternative educational opportunities that address the needs of individual students
- No-tolerance public policy for underage drinking or drug use
- Adequate support for appropriate youth activities
- Services for families and youth that address the causes of juvenile offense including poverty, domestic violence and lack of safe, secure homes
- Adequate funding for substance abuse treatment
- Recognition of and services to specifically address unique needs of minority and female youth.
- Educational programs designed to help youth make decisions about their behavior
- Community education and recreation to promote healthy engagement of youth in the community and to promote intergenerational respect
- Early intervention at the first sign of a child being at-risk for delinquent behavior.
- A full commitment by law enforcement, courts, and the community to the prosecution and elimination of the manufacturing and sale illegal drugs in the community
- Early Childhood programs and parenting education
- Parental involvement is essential in both the prevention and the rehabilitation of youth and restoration of the community.

For youth involved in the justice system services must include:

- Revisions to the Children's Code or other systems which cause delays in the juvenile justice system.
- Use of charging and sentencing principles that recognize the nature and seriousness of the offense and hold youth accountable.
- The expansion of juvenile court resources
- The adequate maintenance and expansion as needed of youth correctional facilities.
- The development of a single assessment process across schools, probation, DHS, mental health, courts, and NYC to assess the youth's family, mental health, educational, social, and health issues.
- A truly integrated continuum of services to address the causes of the delinquency and promote success for the youth
- Close monitoring of youth by probation and parole
- Ready communication and collaboration between probation, DA, courts, DHS, schools, and other service providers
- Support for existing alternatives to placement of youth at NYC.
- Development of new and expanded alternatives to secure detention of youth, including more sentencing options
- Development of services to address the unique needs of minority and female offenders



- Development of transitional services for youth from detention and commitment to facilitate successful return to the community.
- Development of correctional and rehabilitative services that engage the families of the youthful offenders
- Incorporation of Restorative Justice Principles into youth correctional services.
- Rapid and consistent consequences for youth who persist in delinquency or violation of court orders.

GROWTH IN MESA COUNTY

The 1990's was a time of prosperity, growth and rising population in Mesa County. This growth brought problems and challenges to public policy on all levels. To address these issues, LWV of Mesa County began a study of all areas affected by growth and reached consensus on many of those concerns.

1. ANNEXATION

The League of Women Voters of Mesa County supports annexation: to minimize conflicts of authority; to provide needed services; to protect and maintain a city's economic base; to address growth related issues such as crime and traffic; to insure payment for the share of services received and to unify the citizens affected by city policies. LWVMC opposes forced annexation, except unilateral annexation of enclaves existing for three years.

a. Incorporation of Urban Fringe

Cities should incorporate neighborhoods on urban fringes when city services are needed, and the citizens petition for annexation. Cities have a legitimate interest to annex fringe areas to minimize conflicts of authority, address growth related issues, achieve economies of scale, upgrade streets, coordinate sewer services, improve law enforcement and emergency services.

b. Criteria for Annexation

Criteria for annexation should include adherence to the master plan for the geographic area, location within the city's sphere of influence and consent of the property owners (for the proposed annexed area) who own more than 50% of the land area.

c. Forced Annexation

With the exception of enclaves, the League of Women Voters of Mesa County opposes forced annexation. Unilateral annexation of enclaves existing for three years is necessary to maintain compact urban boundaries that can be administered efficiently.

d. Special Neighborhoods

When it is in the city's best interest to annex an area, the neighborhood's ability to pay for the expense of services should not be the final determinant for accepting an area for annexation.

e. Annexation and Representative Democracy



It is through annexation that citizens impacted by city policies attain representation. Annexation can minimize conflicts of authority that evolve from new special districts or the incorporation of new towns too close to an existing city.

f. Economic Benefits of Annexation

Economic factors are important considerations in annexation decisions. It is appropriate for cities to maintain and protect their economic base through strategic annexation. (Adopted 1998)

2. AFFORDABLE HOUSING

League of Women Voters of Mesa County supports measures that will encourage adequate affordable housing for residents of all incomes in Mesa County and believes that provisions for such housing should not be left exclusively to the private sector. Local government incentives to encourage the building of mixed-density housing must not result in the reduction in quality of infrastructure or neighborhood.

Desirable strategies for promoting increased low-income housing stock are: government-guaranteed low-interest loans; construction subsidies to nonprofit agencies; incentives for owner-occupied affordable site-built or manufactured housing and for new or converted affordable rentals; deed restrictions to maintain affordable resale prices; promotion of community acceptance of affordable housing by dispersal throughout the community.

LWVMC favors the following methods to reduce affordable housing costs: flexible zoning and land use regulations; small multiple-unit housing; quality manufactured housing; rehabilitation and conversion of existing structures for housing; and efficient use of the permit process. LWVMC does not favor waiving of impact fees as a means of reducing the cost of affordable housing units. (Adopted 1996)

3. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

League of Women Voters of Mesa County believes that responsible and responsive management of future growth requires public understanding and participation in the decision-making processes by all citizens of the community. Planning Officials should develop readily understandable procedures for public input and encourage public participation in current and future decisions related to growth in Mesa County.

4. COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

As Mesa County prepares to enter the 21st century and to grow to a population that may exceed 250,000, the League of Women Voters of Mesa County believes that citizens would be better served by expanding the number of county commissioners from three to five. (Adopted 1995)

5. HISTORIC PRESERVATION

LWVMC believes that sites, structures and artifacts of significant historical and cultural importance should be preserved. As a necessary step to preservation, a countywide inventory of structures over 50 years old should be completed without delay and periodically updated.



Historic preservation should be funded by government grants, private money, and non-profit programs. Government should assist private sector rehabilitation efforts through flexible zoning as well as any other non-monetary measures. Government's fiscal role should be limited to supporting the form of pass-through funds, loans and special districts.

Museums must have a stable financial base. That base should be provided by a combination of an earmarked mill levy, user fees, and private sources. LWV/MC considers the use of sales tax for museum funding as an undesirable revenue source because it is unpredictable and regressive. (Adopted 1996)

6. **IMPACT FEES**

LWVMC believes the cost of maintaining an adequate infrastructure for a community's needs is the responsibility of the community as a whole; and supports the collection of impact fees to pay for new infrastructure related to residential housing, provided there is a relationship between fees collected and the purpose for which they will be expended.

Impact Fee Standards: Water taps, sewer taps, storm drainage, parks and trees, public buildings and schools are appropriate services and community needs for impact fee assessments. The local government must have legal authority to collect the specific impact fee. Impact fees should be assessed on all new residential development which will place an additional demand on the capital facilities and services funded by the impact fee. The expenditure of the impact fee will benefit the new development. The impact fee structure must reflect the proportionate share attributable to new development. (Adopted 1996)

7. **PLANNING**

League of Women Voters of Mesa County believes growth to be inevitable. And, further that by planning for growth, a community can protect its quality of life, preserve its character and enjoy the benefits that accrue to a growing community.

Land is a limited, non-renewable resource, and the responsibility of good stewardship accompanies the privilege of private ownership. Land use plans for Mesa County communities should strive for a reasonable balance of public and private rights and should encompass measures that ensure sound planning while reflecting a consensus of each community's values.

Master Plans are important to preserve our community's character and identity. They should address strategies for encouraging growth, industrial development, and zoning that complement or preserve the community character; should strive to minimize or mitigate negative impacts of growth; and should maintain and enhance community aesthetics. Comprehensive master plans should also include physical, social, educational, recreational and cultural needs.

Master plans should be flexible, allow for compromise and emphasize cooperative city-county land use decisions and development standards. Local governments should rely on their adopted master plans as a guide in the formulation, adoption and revision of land use policies and zoning rules.

In making land use recommendations to their respective elective bodies, planning commissions should apply zoning and building standards, in the spirit set forth by the master plan.



To assure that the Master plan remains timely and realistic, some orderly method for making changes should be prescribed, which includes public input. While there should be reasonable remedies for unintended consequences, deviations from master plans or land use plans should be discouraged, and should require an argument and rationale as convincing as those in the master plan. Changes signaling a major policy shift should incorporate well-publicized public hearing process. (Adopted 1995)

Sound planning requires use of professional planners, a comprehensive plan and an organized method of land use control. It also requires involvement and cooperation of citizens, elected officials, units of government and agencies on the city, county, regional and state level. Planning boards should represent the publics they serve, with a careful balance of vested interests. They should be guided in technical matters by a professional staff and should be aware of the need to maintain clear lines of communication with governmental and planning bodies at other levels. (Adopted 1995)

a. Land Use Standards

Land Use Standards must be consistent with the existing master plan. These standards should assure that changes in land uses are compatible with the values, standards and traditions of the surrounding community, compatible with the carrying capacity of the community, and will not alter the character of the surrounding community. Land Use Standards should protect the community from land uses that will degrade the ecological balance, or that will capriciously devalue the assets of neighboring property owners. These plans should provide for adequate open spaces and preserve scenic vistas of significance to the community as a whole. Governments should be encouraged to use "common" lands for linked trails; for example, city-owned drainage areas or city and county road shoulders. A community's master land use plan should:

- incorporate goals placing a high priority on cooperation and communication with other governmental jurisdictions and planning entities.
- address residential, industrial and commercial development.
- anticipate changes in population, facilities and the use of natural resources.
- address carrying capacity issues and air and water quality standards necessary to maintain a healthful environment.
- incorporate a water conservation policy that assures continued availability of water countywide.
- promote transportation circulation, designate adequate arterials and encourage incentives for alternative transportation.
- address strategies to stimulate availability of affordable housing.- incorporate goals placing a high priority on cooperation and communication with other governmental jurisdictions and planning entities. - address residential, industrial and commercial development.
- anticipate changes in population, facilities and the use of natural resources.
- address carrying capacity issues and air and water quality standards necessary to maintain a healthful environment.



- incorporate a water conservation policy that assures continued availability of water countywide.
- promote transportation circulation, designate adequate arterials and encourage incentives for alternative transportation.
- address strategies to stimulate availability of affordable housing.
- encourage a range of commercial areas to accommodate consumer demands as they emerge, such as small-scale shopping areas within walking distance designed to blend with the neighborhood served.

b. Quality of Life

Residential areas should be planned to include housing for persons of all incomes and should be protected from air pollution, traffic congestion, excessive noise and encroachment by inappropriate commercial enterprises. These efforts should be applied to both new and existing areas. Aesthetic considerations should be an important part of comprehensive planning. Plans should be designed with attention to provisions for a healthy economy, adequate and affordable housing for residents of all incomes, easy access to employment opportunities, adequate transportation, open space, green areas, and noise control. They should encourage incoming industries that are non-energy abusing, environmentally clean, and judicious in use of water.

Comprehensive plans and zoning laws should emphasize planning for transportation options and alternatives to the automobile, meeting the need for dispersed housing for low income residents, and allowing varied land uses within designated planned areas.

c. Transportation

The League of Women Voters of Mesa County (LWVMC) believes a balanced transportation system should include a variety of modes for each area (downtown, valley-wide, county-wide and, last, regionally, if feasible) which helps improve mobility and the quality of life for all residents.

The LWVMC supports car-pooling; development of mass transit alternatives; emission regulation; no-burn day enforcement; wood stove regulations; encouragement of new construction with easy access to bus stops and bike and walking paths; long-term parking limits (after provision of mass transportation options); and open-air burning limit with limited permits issued to non-agricultural properties.

A mass transit system should include the following: access to housing, jobs, shopping, medical care and government services; efficient routes, energy efficient vehicles and non-polluting mass-transit vehicles; and marketing techniques to motivate public use of alternative modes of transportation.

Funding for mass transit should come from a combination of sources: federal and state grants; local government monies (either dedicated mill levy, special district designation and/or local sales tax tied to luxury items); and user fees. Private donations could be used for capital expenditures but not relied upon for operating expenses. proportional share attributable to new development. (Adopted 1996)

d. Zoning Enforcement

Consistent enforcement is an important aspect of proper zoning, as is the stability of zoning in maintaining and preserving the character of the neighborhood and protecting the residents. Enforcement procedures which rely on neighbor complaints are sufficient. (Adopted 1995)



ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION

Local Level Action taken based upon Nation and State Positions

POSITION

The League of Women Voters of Mesa County believes local energy resources must be managed to support preservation of the physical, chemical and biological integrity of ecosystems, and provide protection for public health and the environment. Energy extraction must balance the need for economic development with the well-being of our society and land.

Because the conservation and use of clean and renewable sources of energy are essential to meeting future needs, the League believes public entities should lead the way in expanding alternative energy programs, limiting emissions, reducing waste, and finding non-polluting efficiencies in fossil fuel uses.

HISTORY

Western Colorado has a history of aggressive energy extraction cycles. There has been oil and gas exploration and development on the Western Slope of Colorado since the early 1900's. Whether it is coal, oil, gas, or uranium, the natural resources of our region have been a target for development and extraction of energy sources to fuel the nation's economy.

In recent years the region has experienced another surge of energy exploration and extraction. The economy has grown aggressively with all of the inherent benefits and drawbacks. Demand for services has fueled other sectors of the economy and put pressure on governments to meet the needs.

These extraction efforts have a major impact on those of us who live in Western Colorado.

These impacts include:

- Significant economic drivers to the communities when extraction efforts are being aggressively pursued;
- Major economic and social deficits when energy development is reduced or ends;
- Fluctuations in tax revenues and demands for governmental services and infrastructure, complicated by TABOR provisions;
- Significant political influence by industry special interests;
- A lasting impact on the ecology of the region including water, air, land, wildlife and aesthetic qualities.
- consumer costs for natural gas, electricity, and gasoline increase and are expected to continue to rise.

The League supports:

- It has become imperative for public as well as private institutions to seek ways to find sustainability by reducing costs, wastes, and pollutants.
- Enforcement and cooperation with state and federal agencies with regards to oversight in permitting and extraction activities.
- Tax policy directing revenues from energy development to those areas most impacted by the development;



- Regulations (with enforcement) requiring mitigation and reclamation of damage to flora, fauna, land, air or water disturbed through exploration or extraction of fuels;
- Encouragement of cost effective renewable sources of energy;
- Strong focus on the conservation of all resources in both public and private uses.