

2022 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 2022 legislative priorities set forth below. Our legislative priorities are outlined by themes from our strategic plan.



Unmistakable 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 2021 legislative session, changes were made to the budget process used by Kansas municipalities requiring a hearing and notice to be sent to taxpayers if the governing body proposed an increase to the revenue neutral rate. The City of Lawrence opposes further limitations on its taxing authority. The ability to set budget and spending priorities locally is at the heart of City's Home Rule Authority.

The City of Lawrence supports strategies and financing mechanisms competitive with other cities in the state and region to support expansion of infrastructure for housing and economic development.

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 does not support dividing Douglas County into more than one congressional district.

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 to the level it was in 2011 when Kansas became the first state to defund its arts commission.

Special Committee on Liquor Law Modernization. The COVID-19 pandemic brought changes to outdated Kansas liquor laws. A special interim committee will be making recommendations to update Kansas liquor control statutes. The City of Lawrence supports modernization of Kansas liquor laws.

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.



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 legislature should review recommendations from the statewide Kansas Housing Study to be released in early 2022.

- The City of Lawrence supports creation of a statewide taskforce on Affordable Housing.
- The City of Lawrence supports assistance for mortgage, rent and utilities support due to COVID-19.
- The City of Lawrence supports the creation of a state program that would enable lenders to issue energy efficient mortgages based on the Federal program administered by Federal Housing Administration.

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. We encourage the Legislature to allocate increased funding for the Kansas State Board of Indigents’ Defense Service in order to reduce public defender turnover and caseloads while implementing a client-centered, holistic defense model.

The City of Lawrence supports the following changes:

- Cash bonds (legislative changes to move to a no cash bond for certain crimes).
- Take action related to the elimination of criminalization of poverty.
- 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 and 2021 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.

Support for Statewide Legislation Regulating Bodywork Professionals. The City of Lawrence supports legislation that would create a statewide system for the licensing of bodywork professionals. Legislation was introduced in the 2019 legislative session that would have enacted a massage therapist licensure act. That bill would have aligned Kansas with the great majority of states that regulate the massage industry, which in turn would benefit the health, safety, and welfare of Kansans.

Cleanup of Former Farmland Industries Nitrogen Plant. The City of Lawrence requests funding to support the cleanup of the former Farmland Industries Nitrogen Plant site. During Farmland's forty-eight years of operation, it is estimated to have produced and distributed billions of pounds of nitrogen fertilizers that were applied throughout the Midwest and other parts of the United States. The City of Lawrence supports the use of the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act, Environmental Justice funds, Brownfield funds, and additional state efforts to fund the Remedial Action Plan for the Former Farmland Industries Nitrogen Plant. Current information indicates that the cost to remediate the pollution and contamination will be significantly higher than initial estimates provided by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and will require twenty-five plus years of operations and maintenance. The increased cost estimates for the successful remediation of the site creates an undue financial burden on the citizens and taxpayers of Lawrence, considering the economic benefits this facility would have assuredly contributed to agriculture production.

Clean Water. The City of Lawrence supports the use of Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act for clean water with efficient and equitable distribution of allocations to communities. The City supports grants to address infrastructure projects and programs driven by regulatory requirements.

Support for the State Water Plan. The City requests full funding of the State Water Plan fund through the required transfers of \$6 million dollars annually from the State General Fund (K.S.A. 82a-953a) and \$2 million dollars annually from the Economic Development Fund (K.S.A. 79-4804).

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 (KanCare) 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 the Kansas Medicaid program - KanCare. 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.

The City supports an expansion of covered services to include twelve months of post-partum care. Additionally, access to the Women Infants and Children (WIC) and SNAP programs should be expanded, not limited, to ensure our

most vulnerable have access to federal and state support.

The City of Lawrence also supports an increase to the allowable reimbursement rate for Medicaid services provided by Emergency Management Services to support workforce sustainability and operational funding.

Food Programs and Systems. The City of Lawrence and its local Food Policy Council, support the Kansas Food Action Network's (KFAN) statewide priorities, including support for:

- Farm to School. The City supports efforts that will increase funding for Farm to School programs.
- Cottage Foods. The City supports a review of “cottage food regulations” to identify barriers for value-added producers and we encourage the legislature to enact law that would promote entrepreneurship and drive economic activity.
- Statewide Food, Farm and Policy Council. The City supports efforts to form a food council at the state level, providing multi-sector review and representation of food policies, which concern the whole state.

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. The City supports changes to mandatory waiting periods after retirement to allow for the re-employment of KPERS eligible employees. Such changes would assist in keeping cities fully staffed in the tight labor markets of today’s economy.

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 state sales tax on groceries and on feminine hygiene products.



Connected City

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 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 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.

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. The City supports continued investment and upgrades to provide redundancy and state of the art technology.

