

League of Women Voters of Sonoma County
Local Positions
Revised June 2009

I

BUDGET PROCESS: SONOMA AND ITS CITIES

We, members of LWVSC, recognize that the budget process is not a one-time occurrence but a year-round continuing process, and that citizen participation in the budget process of Sonoma County and its cities must also continue. We therefore support:

- A. Preliminary public discussion by decision makers of the goals, policies, and priorities which the budget must subsequently reflect.
- B. Periodic public review by decision makers to evaluate effectiveness of program against budgetary goals.
- C. Public notice of deliberations on issues affecting the budget.
- D. Availability of full information to the public.

Specifically, Sonoma County agencies should help citizens on a continuing basis to become better informed about functions and departments, and should improve methods of making information available, by:

- A. Providing more descriptive information on agenda issues.
- B. Distributing information for easy public reference.
- C. Providing background information on important agenda items for the public.

The Board of Supervisors should:

- A. Set broad goals, policies, and program priorities and estimate costs for as many years ahead as feasible, reviewing and updating these for each annual budget.
- B. Strengthen the authority and accountability of the administrator in managing administrative affairs of County government so that the Board can devote adequate attention to policy and priorities in budget making.

- C. Provide reports to the public both quarterly and at the end of the fiscal year. These reports should include an evaluation of the programs and financial performance of the current budget against measurable objectives. (Systems of reporting should be developed and put into effect by the administrator at all levels of the departments.)

(1970; 1990; 1993; 2008)

II

CABLE TELEVISION FRANCHISING IN SONOMA COUNTY

We, members of the LWVSC, support:

- A. Participation by the public in the franchising process: specifically, early public notice of franchising proposals and the rate changes, public hearings, and full disclosure of the negotiating process.
- B. The process of interconnection of cable systems in the County to the extent practical, for use by emergency services, County governments, and education links. A public advisory board should be created to establish guidelines and priorities.
- C. The requirement that franchises provide channels for the use of public groups and individuals, as well as funding to make programming possible. Public participation in the management of the access channels should be provided for. The access channels and staff should

- 1. Provide training and developmental opportunities for various individuals and groups.
- 2. Provide a vehicle of expression for minorities and other under-represented groups.
- 3. Provide access for diverse groups.
- 4. Enhance the cultural life of the community.

(1983; 1993)

III OPEN GOVERNMENT: SONOMA COUNTY AND ITS CITIES

“The League of Women Voters believe that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen’s right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.” (LWV Principles)

At the same time, citizens have not only the right but the responsibility to be informed about and involved in the process of deciding public policy at all governmental levels.

We, The LWVSC, support measures to promote an open government system that assures opportunities for citizen participation in government decision making.

We recommend:

- A. Open meetings. Thorough orientation of officials to:
 - 1. Open government meeting laws.
 - 2. Available documentation on open government legal requirements.
- B. Notice of meetings. The use of:
 - 1. Open government meeting laws.
 - 2. The legal distinction between public and private documents.
 - 3. Available documentation on open government legal requirements.
- C. Agendas and background information. Encouraging public understanding by:
 - 1. Having agendas available in advance and during meetings.
 - 2. Expanding agenda summaries.
 - 3. Placing agenda background information for easy public reference.
 - 4. Providing adequate facilities for anticipated audience.
- D. Public participation. Permitting individual statements by
 - 1. Establishing definite time and duration of non-agenda statements rather than leaving them for the end of the meeting.

- 2. Giving opportunity for public to speak on specific agenda items at time of consideration of item.
- 3. Setting reasonable time limits to assure fairness and broad participation.
- 4. Providing adequate facilities for anticipated audience.

E. Meeting records. Giving consideration to:

- 1. Keeping records of meetings on the most advanced medium possible, including written minutes.
- 2. Availability of both written and taped records to public.
- 3. Preserving records with full consideration given to legal requirements and the public interest.

F. Official accessibility. Making elected officials reasonably accessible to the public outside of meeting times

We support efforts of public agencies to better inform the public on government functions and organizations. Specifically, we encourage:

- A. Wide distribution of printed information on government functions and services through many avenues including libraries and organizations.
- B. Well-publicized information workshop and study sessions.
- C. Wide use of media in advance of public meetings on major issues.
- D. Adequate funding for public information process.

We encourage all registered voters and particularly League members to become actively involved in public decision making by serving on citizen advisory boards, attending public meetings regularly, becoming informed on issues, speaking before and writing to officials, government bodies and “The Editor” and casting an informed vote at every election.

(1986; 1993)

IV SANTA ROSA GENERAL PLAN

We, members of the LWVSC, support a General Plan for Santa Rosa which guides the future of the community in a manner which enhances the quality of life for its citizens socially, economically and environmentally.

Specifically, we support:

- A. Adoption of consistent policies and ordinances which would more strictly control the growth and development of the General Plan area.
- B. Measures to preserve open space and adequate greenbelts. At present, emphasis should be placed on acquisition of additional park land rather than development of existing sites.
- C. Improved coordination between the Santa Rosa City Council and its advisory and policy-making boards and commissions in implementing General Plan goals.
- D. More effective coordination between the City and County in determining policy in areas of mutual concern.
- E. Encouragement of mixes of housing types to meet the needs of varying income level groups.
- F. Continuing review of the Zoning Ordinance and Building and Housing Codes to reflect the changing needs of the community.
- G. Sufficient qualified staff support to implement General Plan regulations.
- H. Use of rehabilitation, redevelopment and conservation in housing and neighborhoods where such measures are clearly beneficial to the community.
- I. Broadly based citizen involvement in all stages of the planning process.
- J. Continuing consideration of innovative solutions of land use controls. Action by local government to obtain national, state, regional and local legislation for implementation of innovative solutions.
- K. Periodic review and updating of the General Plan.

Clarification of consensus: While recognizing the necessity for a balance between economic stability, environmental protection and human needs, we feel that the underlying philosophy of the General Plan should be oriented toward a policy of controlled growth which would not only protect but enhance the quality of life in the area.

We urge that priorities be established for short-range goals in order to measure the attainment of long range plans. Short range goals should include but not be limited to the following: adoption of a utilities

element, formation of master plan for waterways, zoning for critical environmental areas, development of specific neighborhood and/or area plans, and dedication of park and recreation land, or payment in lieu of, as a requirement of new development.

(1963; 1973; 1976; 1980; 1991; 1993)

V SEWAGE TREATMENT – WASTEWATER AND SLUDGE

We, members of the LWVSC, support policies to ensure that sewage treatment and disposal of wastewater and sludge reflect the following priorities:

- A. Crucial criteria:
 - 1. Protection of public health and environment.
 - 2. Protection of beneficial uses of receiving waters.
 - 3. Encouragement of beneficial uses of wastewater and sludge.
 - 4. Maintenance of system to ensure reliability, including regular monitoring program.
 - 5. Capability of system to keep pace with population changes.
- B. Highly desirable criteria:
 - 1. Flexibility of design to accommodate changes in weather patterns to guarantee year-round operation.
 - 2. Equitable financing of operation and maintenance.
 - 3. Equitable financing of expansion.
 - 4. Flexibility of design and operation to accommodate technological advances.
 - 5. Feasibility of technical design.
- C. Criterion also desirable:
 - 1. Correlation of planning, sizing and design with relevant City and County General Plans.
- D. Criteria also to be considered:
 - 1. Public acceptability of proposed system cost.
 - 2. Public acceptability of design and operation.
 - 3. Public acceptability of proposed method of financing.

This position will be used in connection with Open Government Position. (1987; 1991; 1993; 2008)

VI
SONOMA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

We, the LWVSC, support the Sonoma County General Plan to guide the future of the county in a manner which enhances the quality of life for its citizens socially, economically, and environmentally.

Specifically, we support:

- A. Consistent policies and ordinances which will effectively implement the General Plan.
- B. More effective coordination of the cities and county in determining and implementing policy in areas of mutual concern.
- C. Adequate staffing to implement the General Plan
- D. Adherence to the growth rate set forth in the General Plan guided by the following measures in order of priority:
 - 1. Infilling in existing communities.
 - 2. Compact growth of existing communities.
 - 3. Provision that if new communities are necessary to accommodate population, they should be self-contained.
- E. Use of rehabilitation, redevelopment, and conservation of housing and neighborhoods where such measures are clearly beneficial to the County and the people affected.
- F. Periodic review of the zoning ordinances and the building and housing codes to reflect the changing needs of the County.
- G. Encouragement of mixes of housing types to meet the needs of various groups with emphasis on meeting needs of low-income groups.
- H. Measures to preserve open space and establish greenbelts to ensure community identity and geographic distinctness.
- I. Preservation of visual, economic, and natural resources, such as:
 - 1. Agricultural lands
 - 2. Timber lands
 - 3. Wetlands
 - 4. Clean natural waterways
 - 5. Clean air
 - 6. Soils
 - 7. Trees
 - 8. Significant wildlife habitat
 - 9. Natural hills and ridges
 - 10. Ground water
- J. Preservation of the coastal area in a natural state with access for the public.
- K. Development of adequate transportation facilities in Sonoma County, including:

- 1. Public transit services.
- 2. Bicycle facilities.
- 3. Pedestrian facilities.

- L. Broadly based citizen involvement in all stages of the planning process.
- M. Periodic review and updating of the General Plan to assess progress and set priorities for implementation.

We support measures to implement the General Plan of Sonoma County which will ensure land use policies designed to preserve and protect our environment while these goals are still attainable. We believe citizens should be involved in the ongoing implementation of the General Plan. We believe the General Plan should be strictly followed: the zoning and ordinances should protect the interests of the community at large and variances should be limited.

We encourage governmental agencies to show leadership in promoting conservation of natural resources through good consumer practices, by example and public education, and by adopting appropriate resolutions and ordinances.

We support coordination of activities having an impact on the environment. This coordination can be achieved through consultation between representatives of agencies at all levels of government primarily involved with the protection of the environment. We believe that, in order to be most effective, this coordination and consultation should be the responsibility of some specific existing agency or officials, and that the public at large should be included in the coordination and consultation process.

League members, as individuals, should be encouraged to conserve natural resources, to speak before or write to agencies debating environmental matters, and to join or support environmental protection organizations.

(1979; 1993, 2009)

VII
TRANSPORTATION

We believe that the true cost of transportation should be made known. Subsidies of any form of transportation should be clear and not hidden.

We believe that local tax money should be used to reduce traffic congestion. A variety of funding methods are appropriate including general funds,

sales tax revenues and private sources such as developers' fees. The funds generated should be spent on the most cost effective traffic reduction projects.

We regard provision of an integrated, multimodal, efficient, cost effective public transportation network as an important responsibility of local and regional government. Specifically, we support:

- A. Measures which will enable local and regional jurisdictions to ensure an adequate and convenient integrated public transportation network in Sonoma County.

Objectives:

- 1. Reduce use of single-occupant automobiles in order to conserve energy, and reduce air pollution and highway congestion.
- 2. Meet the needs of those dependent on public transportation.

- B. Maintenance and improvement of fixed route service.

Objectives:

- 1. Maintain inter-county service at a level that best serves the needs of Sonoma County citizens.
- 2. Improve the county-wide transportation network to serve recognized centers of employment, commercial activities, education, health care, recreation and social services.
- 3. Increase frequency of service on urban routes to encourage patronage.
- 4. Extend hours of service as demand warrants.
- 5. Support development and/or preservation of rights-of-way for public transportation.

- C. A county-wide and regional public transportation consortium.

Objectives:

- 1. Plan and coordinate activities and schedules of various public transportation jurisdictions serving Sonoma and adjacent counties.
- 2. Negotiate, secure and share non-local subsidies.
- 3. Be composed primarily of members accountable to the geographical units they represent.
- 4. Increase public information about transportation services.

- 5. Encourage full public participation in setting priorities for transportation maintenance and improvement.

- D. Financing based in part on subsidies from local, state, and national sources.

Objectives:

- 1. Set fares low enough to induce ridership but high enough to meet standards set by federal legislation.
- 2. Equalize fares for like types of services.
- 3. Develop local funding sources to establish and operate an integrated, efficient, cost-effective public transportation network.
- 4. Increase funding for car pools, van pools and bicycle ways.

- E. Agencies that provide supplementary transit services.

Objectives:

- 1. Meet the special needs of the elderly and handicapped.
- 2. Encourage use of volunteer paratransit services with consideration for cost-effectiveness of providers.
- 3. Avoid duplication and encourage coordination of paratransit services.

- F. Land use plans and decisions linked to transportation needs with support for Transportation System Management.

Objectives:

- 1. Use local governments' land use planning and decision authority to reduce dependency on motorized travel and to enhance the feasibility and attractiveness of public transportation for personal and business travel.
- 2. Develop strategies to promote increased use of public transportation, car and van pooling, non-motorized travel and flex-time schedules.
- 3. Include transportation planning as a major factor when considering jobs/housing balance, city-centered growth, and open space.
- 4. Add components for growth management to city and county general plans, which should set performance standards for transportation as well as other local services.

5. Enhance public transportation within established communities to maintain compact growth lines.

(1981; expanded and reaffirmed 1990; 1991; 1993; modified 1995, modified 2001, modified 2006)

VIII FINANCING LOCAL SCHOOLS

The LWVSC recognizes the LWVSC's position advocating adequate and fair funding of local schools. Until that goal is reached, LWVSC supports increased local funding in schools of Sonoma County serving grades K through 12.

The LWVSC supports local funding through a combination of bond, parcel tax, sales tax, and/or developer fees subject to review of individual proposals as they are developed.

The following guidelines should be used when evaluating local school funding ballot proposals:

LWVSC should review the affected school district for:

- A. Past budget cuts.
- B. Alternatives sought to remedy fiscal problems.
- C. Special needs in the district.
- D. Equity of funding for comparable districts.
- E. Application of new revenue.

(1993)

IX LIVING WAGE ORDINANCE

We, the members of LWVSC, strongly affirm the LWVUS Social Policy position that supports programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and promote self-sufficiency. To this end, LWVSC supports the concept of a Living Wage Ordinance that is designed to help as many covered employees as possible earn wages at or above the poverty level of Sonoma County.

We recognize the following:

- A. Working people have the right to an income sufficient to meet basic needs of food, shelter and access to health care.

- B. The current minimum wage is inadequate to support an individual or family at or above the poverty level.
- C. The cost of living in Sonoma County is higher than the Federal or California averages.
- D. The social advantages of self-sufficiency include, but are not limited to, a reduction in public assistance and crime, an increase in employee productivity and retention, an increase in local spending and higher quality of life and human dignity in the workforce.

We believe that it is highly desirable for a Living Wage Ordinance to cover the following employees of the County and its cities:

- Full and part-time employees.
- Employees of businesses contracting with the County and its cities.
- Employees of business and agencies receiving grants, subsidies, loans and incentives from the County and its cities.

Those exempted from the ordinance may include seasonal employees under the age of 18.

When considering the provisions of a proposed Living Wage Ordinance, LWVSC recognizes that an ordinance may more narrowly define employees to be covered and/or exempted.

LWVSC members, as individuals, should think about the concept of a living wage and be encouraged to educate ourselves and others about what it means for our community.

(2003)