

Association of Washington Cities

Statement of Policy

2015



This *Statement of Policy* is approved by the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) membership of 281 cities and towns as represented by voting delegates at AWC's annual Business Meeting. The *Statement of Policy* outlines positions AWC holds on fundamental municipal issues and serves as the framework for developing AWC's legislative priorities and positions. AWC's legislative priorities are annually approved by the AWC Board of Directors following review and recommendation by the AWC Legislative Priorities Committee.

The *Statement of Policy* is developed at least every six years by the State and Federal Policy Committee, which consists of city officials representing the association's board districts and appointed by the AWC President for a two-year term. After approval by the membership, the document is affirmed annually with an opportunity to make floor amendments by the membership at the Business Meeting.

The *Statement of Policy* was adopted by the membership on June 19, 2014, at the AWC annual Business Meeting and amended at the June 25, 2015, Business Meeting.

Core principles



Promote and enhance healthy and diverse cities.

Washington cities of all shapes and sizes are where people and commerce thrive. This does not just happen. It evolves and prospers from the engagement of those within cities as well as people, businesses, and institutions all around them. The Association of Washington Cities:

- Respects the different perspectives and beliefs of our citizenry and encourages participation by all citizens in the decision-making process at all levels of government;
- Supports efforts to work with public and private interests to ensure public confidence in the ability of government to be a constructive force in our communities;
- Is committed to the principles of civility, access to quality education, fairness, and respect for diversity;
- Supports adequate and reliable funding for our education system which is a key component of healthy and prosperous communities;
- Promotes growth of vibrant cities through responsible stewardship and integrity of the resources provided in order to invest and care for those living in the community.

Promote and enhance Washington cities' ability to provide services. The most effective, responsible, and responsive government is the government closest to the people. The Association will:

- Seek to provide enhanced opportunities for cities to manage their own fiscal affairs;
- Rethink and, as appropriate, embrace opportunities for service delivery efficiencies within cities and among local and regional service providers;
- Support reasonable reforms of the state revenue and regulatory system that adhere to the principles of simplicity, fairness, and balance and that do not infringe upon the ability of cities to reflect local priorities and economies;
- Seek adjustments to existing, or creation of new, local revenue tools that provide sustainable funding to support needed city services in communities throughout Washington;
- Oppose diversions of state-shared revenues which are critical sources of funding for cities;
- Oppose unfunded and underfunded legislative and administrative mandates, as well as the imposition of substantial fees on cities as a means of shifting the costs of state operations onto cities;
- Oppose efforts to reduce local revenues and revenue authorities;
- Support governmental decisions being made by the government closest to the people;
- The cost of funding decisions made by other levels of government should be incurred by the governmental body making those decisions.

Where this Statement of Policy is silent on a public policy issue affecting municipal government, it shall be the position of the Association to support provision of authority, autonomy, and resources to cities. AWC will seek to embody these core principles through our work on the specific issue areas below.



Economic Development

Sixty-four percent of Washington's citizens live within cities or towns. In addition, businesses in Washington State's metro areas generate 94 percent of the state's gross domestic product. Cities and towns are the economic engines of our state.

The ability of cities to provide municipal services and to maintain and enhance community viability depends upon a healthy local economy. Cities need economic development tools that assist in maintaining, expanding, and diversifying local economies. These tools must include appropriate state infrastructure programs and flexible local options, and each city should have equal access to such tools.

The Legislature must recognize the importance of cities to the state's economic health and partner with cities when advancing economic development objectives.

AWC supports:

- An expanded menu of economic development tools that supports infrastructure investments and recognizes the unique characteristics of each city and town, such as authorization for value capture and tax increment financing, and continuation of the local infrastructure financing tool;
- State funding and technical assistance that result in a skilled, educated workforce to ensure future job growth and the retention of businesses and industries in cities and towns;
- Financial support for economic diversification in cities adversely impacted by unique local conditions or by the elimination or downsizing of public or private employment opportunities;
- Efforts to ease military transitions and impacts on personnel and communities;
- A balanced regulatory environment that enables employer retention and job growth while protecting the economic and employment values of our natural resources;
- Recognition of and promotion of tourism;
- Sensitivity to state decisions impacting the economic health and vitality of our border communities.

Energy & Telecommunications



AWC acknowledges the importance of energy and communications policies that promote equal access and connectivity for all citizens, and protect and enhance local government authority.

AWC supports:

- The operation of municipal electric, natural gas, and communications systems, and the recognition of regulatory and mandated costs upon these systems;
- New innovations and technologies that improve dissemination of information, customer service, energy efficiency, and the deployment of cost-effective alternative resources;
- The pursuit of state and federal telecommunications and utility policies that protect local government authority to manage rights-of-way; protect the zoning and siting authority of facilities within cities; retain franchise authority to ensure build-out and universal service; encourage undergrounding of facilities where possible; and protect public, education, and government access (PEG) television.

Local officials place high importance on protecting and enhancing the environment in order to maintain a sustainable quality of life for both current and future generations. In many parts of the state, a healthy natural environment is a key factor in local economic vitality. Cities take our role seriously in conserving the vibrant natural environment that is an intrinsic part of what makes our communities special. Cities recognize the roles that civic education and involvement plays in maintaining our quality of life.

Conserving our natural resources must be balanced with providing adequate economic opportunities.

Federal, state, and county agencies relying upon city actions to protect the environment must adequately support cities with funding and technical support tailored to fit local needs and circumstances.

Water Quality and Quantity

AWC supports:

- Protection and preservation of municipal water rights and drinking water sources, and affirmation of the needs of growing communities for sufficient resources to efficiently serve expanding populations;
- Planning and implementation of water quality programs. Such programs should consider the costs and benefits of implementation for individual communities;
- Water conservation and management tools that enhance flexibility for cities to make the best use of limited resources.

Flood Protection

AWC supports federal and state flood control policies and funding that recognizes the role of cities in basin-wide flood protection and that acknowledge the needs and constraints of communities of varying sizes and locations.

Solid and Hazardous Waste

AWC supports:

- Recognition of the diverse challenges facing cities across the state and the need for waste stream control and recycling options for cities;
- Exploring opportunities to rethink management of the waste and recycling streams to meet long-term challenges, including education, product stewardship, and other innovative opportunities;
- Establishment of secure medicine take-back programs;
- Federal and state funding for the timely clean-up of hazardous waste sites and ongoing efforts to responsibly monitor and inform cities when the transport of hazardous substances could present a danger to citizens.

Air Quality

AWC supports city participation in the establishment and implementation of federal and state policies that impose and maintain air quality levels that protect against adverse effects upon humans, animals, and plants and respond to a changing climate by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Balanced Regulatory Reform

AWC supports all levels of government continually seeking opportunities to streamline regulations in a manner that creates efficiencies and provides consistency between agencies while maintaining environmental protections.

Weather Related Events

AWC supports state and federal policies for preparing for and preventing adverse weather related events and authority for cities to develop their own policies.

Flexible General Government Operations



Cities are responsible for solving day-to-day public problems and responding directly to the needs of their citizens. City officials need local decision-making authority and flexibility to work with their citizens on appropriate policies and solutions.

Cities support open and transparent government – whether it is public participation in meetings or the availability of public records – and remain committed to finding new ways to best use limited resources to meet this commitment.

AWC supports:

- Legislative and administrative activity that does not impose new mandates and respects the need for greater local flexibility in methods and in funding to meet beneficial outcomes and performance goals;
- Innovative solutions to the burgeoning costs of maintaining a transparent, open government that take into account modern technology such as e-mail, social media, and metadata;
- Objective review of the impact of statewide ballot measures and initiatives on local governments, both before and after passage of such measures;
- Mitigating the cost of litigation and penalties related to public records based on inadvertent errors and financially motivated, punitive, or retributive requests;
- Modifications to the Public Records Act that protect vulnerable persons or create operational efficiencies and removes exemption of the Washington State Legislature from the Act;
- Relief from undue and excessive liability exposure.

Housing



An ample and diverse supply of safe housing is a critical component of a healthy community. Many public and private partners are needed to ensure the availability of housing for all citizens, including those in need of low-income and affordable units. Cities recognize the need to provide housing assistance but require additional financing and land-use tools.

AWC supports:

- Maintaining and increasing resources to address unmet housing needs, including funds for shelters, transitional and permanent housing for moderate- and low-income, homeless, farm worker, and special needs populations, including tools to create housing with access to transportation and social services infrastructure;
- Maintaining and increasing the State Housing Trust Fund;
- Expanded use of incentives, land use policies, public education, and technical assistance to foster development and retention of affordable housing;
- Increased opportunities to create greater connection between housing policy and economic development.

Eroding and inadequate infrastructure threatens the state's economic competitiveness, safety, and quality of life. Over the past several years, population growth, increasingly stringent regulatory requirements, and an inability to make capital investments during the economic downturn have left cities with vast infrastructure needs. For example, it is estimated that cities will need \$3.4 billion over the next 10 years just to maintain and repair city streets and bridges. This is in addition to responsibilities for maintaining and expanding other core infrastructure systems such as stormwater, sewer, drinking water, parks, and other public facilities.

Local infrastructure is the invisible backbone of our state, essential to a vibrant economy, a high quality of life, public health and safety, and a healthy environment. Investment in city infrastructure is essential to the state's continued economic recovery.

Transportation

AWC supports:

- Viable, dedicated, and collectable local transportation funding – such as the transportation benefit district authority, tax increment financing mechanisms, and street maintenance utility authority options – that does not have to compete with other city services;
- Any new state transportation proposal that includes a proportionate distribution of revenues or transportation program funding for cities;
- Ensuring federal and state resources that invest in the city transportation system and acknowledge it is integral to the movement of people, goods, and services in Washington State;
- Funding for improvements along rail freight corridors, including grade separations, to mitigate freight rail traffic through cities;
- Transit services and other non-motorized options that enhance mobility and the quality of life in cities;
- Regional transportation financing and governance mechanisms that provide for meaningful city participation and an equitable distribution of funding and transportation investments.

Public Works

AWC supports:

- Adequate and predictable state funding of local infrastructure assistance programs for the acquisition, development, rehabilitation, and maintenance of infrastructure, including sewer, drinking water, stormwater, and parks and recreational facilities;
- Enabling cities to manage public works needs in the most efficient manner possible, including flexible and reasonable contracting and procurement requirements;
- Equal city access to capital assistance funding and programs.

Land Use & Planning



A core function of cities and towns is their ability to plan for, manage, and protect land uses and municipal services within their borders. This is accomplished by a city's ability to zone without preemption from the state. Washington's cities and towns desire to both maintain and expand opportunities for their citizens to live, work, and play in vibrant and healthy communities.

AWC recognizes the benefit of clearly defined state goals that guide local land use, economic development, transportation, and public facility planning, as long as they are implemented through locally-determined processes and regulations.

AWC supports policies that promote and encourage the growth of cities as a means to more efficiently provide and maintain needed infrastructure and services.

Urban or urbanizing areas require a range of municipal services that are most efficiently provided by cities, including but not limited to water and sewer utility services.

AWC supports:

- Joint planning by cities, counties, and special purpose districts in areas subject to future annexation to ensure the consistency of development and efficient provision of services;
- A full array of tools for cities to facilitate and finance annexation of adjacent urbanizing areas;
- State laws that impose minimum construction standards through a uniform building code;
- Local flexibility to amend state codes above minimum standards;
- Land use and planning laws that protect critical natural areas as well as city authority to address impacts on the built environment like noise pollution and parking issues;
- Planning and financing tools that foster the development of transit oriented development.

City officials are best positioned to direct the resources and efforts that reflect community values and standards to ensure public safety within their boundaries. To achieve this, cities need an adequate array of resources, tools, and authority to respond to ever changing law and justice and public safety needs.

AWC supports:

- Active participation by cities and towns in policy decisions related to law and justice services, including law enforcement, jails, and courts;
- Continued state partnership in funding criminal justice programs, recognizing state reductions for social and human service programs impact local criminal justice resources;
- Flexibility to provide law enforcement, court, emergency management and other public safety services in a manner consistent with local priorities;
- City authority to determine the appropriate municipal court structure, including authority to determine the best method of judicial selection;
- Innovative and cost-effective solutions and partnerships to assist overburdened local law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, courts and jails in meeting the demand for services to offenders, victims and the community;
- The need to fund necessary upgrades and replacements for inadequate essential public safety infrastructure;
- Developing dedicated revenue sources to help local government support programs for gang related violent crime prevention, intervention, and targeted criminal justice programs;
- Full state funding for state mandated law enforcement training through the Criminal Justice Training Commission;
- The ability for cities and towns to make local decisions about the most efficient and effective provision of fire suppression, emergency medical, and emergency management programs;
- Reconciling the recreational and medical marijuana markets to ensure legitimate patient access, enforceability, and compliance with federal expectations;
- Maintaining local authority over traditional land use, licensing, local taxes and fees, and other regulatory functions in regards to marijuana production or distribution.

Municipal Finance



Even as the economy is recovering, cities continue to experience substantial difficulty in maintaining basic services and meeting the service demands of their citizens. Sales tax volatility, property tax limitations, the loss of state-shared funds, and rising personnel costs including health care and pension obligations, have contributed to the ongoing fiscal challenges of cities.

The limitations of the current tax structure in accommodating the differing needs and economies of cities continue to damage the fiscal health of cities and towns.

Citizens desire quality services and expect their tax dollars to be spent efficiently and effectively on services they deem most important. Service and program demands continue to grow but revenues are insufficient. City officials must be allowed to work with their citizens to allocate revenues as determined locally. These officials should be given broad discretion to utilize existing revenue sources to respond to local challenges. They should also be given broad authority to manage their expenditures, including personnel costs.

AWC recognizes the differing fiscal needs of the state's cities. Cities should be allowed to develop a revenue structure that best meets their individual circumstances and enables them to enhance their own fiscal health.

AWC supports:

- Securing significant flexibility in the local government tax structure that provides an array of revenue or revenue authority reflecting local needs;
- Securing new revenue to meet the growing service demands and innovative strategies to address citizens' service and program expectations;
- Preserving existing revenue and collection authorities;
- Developing innovative strategies to address the fiscal needs of cities and towns that allow for the ongoing delivery of services and the funding of capital improvements and other fiscal needs. This includes the establishment and funding of municipal corporations, including municipal authorities or districts;
- Ensuring continued appropriation of committed state-shared funds, including restoring funds to traditional levels;
- Retaining the exclusive authority to establish levels of service appropriate to individual cities and towns;
- Ensuring the state appropriately analyzes and documents the fiscal impact of proposed administrative rules, legislation, and certified initiatives impacting local governments;
- Mandates should not be approved without sufficient financial resources. The state should evaluate and address the impacts on local governments on an ongoing basis.



Personnel & Labor Relations

Cities, as a whole, employ a significant workforce and are committed to being responsible employers. Our employees are our most valued asset when it comes to serving the public, and cities are focused on providing a high-quality work environment with fair and balanced compensation for our workforce. As a result, personnel-related expenses account for a substantial portion of municipal expenditures. Cities should be given broad discretion to manage their workforces and establish sustainable approaches to personnel costs, particularly during times of challenging financial conditions. Cities must maintain broad authority to provide services in the most efficient way possible and to determine how best to deliver services through control over standards for benefit and staffing levels.

AWC supports:

- Eliminating unneeded and duplicative personnel regulations and mandates;
- Ensuring cities are provided broad authority to manage their personnel and personnel-related costs, including health care and other benefits;
- Revising collective bargaining rules that have not kept up with the changing legal, social, and fiscal challenges facing cities and towns, in order to provide greater focus on fiscal sustainability;
- Establishing reasonable and predictable pension contribution rates and costs;
- Ensuring local governments have sufficient resources for state-mandated pension funding responsibilities;
- State assistance in meeting existing mandated benefits, including LEOFF 1 retiree medical and long-term-care costs;
- Providing meaningful participation for cities in decisions regarding adoption of personnel and pension-related policies;
- Stable and sustainable workers compensation insurance rates as well as opportunities to expand cost efficient programs that are beneficial to both employees and employers.

Social & Human Services



Social and human services programs are key to healthy communities and help ensure the economic viability of our cities' workforce. AWC supports cities that supplement the services provided by federal, state, and county programs and have chosen to provide additional services closely tailored to their communities. AWC favors programs that promote and encourage self-sufficiency, but recognizes some citizens need ongoing assistance.

AWC supports:

- Adequate federal and state funding for vital social, human services and abuse trauma programs that meet the specific needs of vulnerable populations, including child health and welfare programs; affordable child care; early intervention and prevention programs for at-risk youth; direct assistance and subsistence services; and public health, mental health, transitional housing, and substance abuse programs;
- A comprehensive approach to addressing complex social issues such as poverty, homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, and other human service concerns that involves local based solutions and flexibility in delivery of services.

The health and vitality of local economies are critical to a robust and dynamic national economy. Federal fiscal policies should enhance the ability of local elected officials to respond to needs at the local level, especially during times of economic downturn. Cities rely on federal funding to build infrastructure, support economic development, and ensure public safety. With sufficient federal funds, cities can demonstrate a significant return on investment. This funding must be consistent, stable, and reliable.

AWC opposes federal policies that undermine or preempt the fundamental responsibilities of local governments, including franchising, zoning, siting, issuing permits and licenses, and local code development. In addition, federal policies should not have negative consequences for local taxing and regulatory authority, local businesses, or traditional financing mechanisms for local government projects.

AWC supports:

- A multimodal federal transportation policy that provides stable funding for the nation's transportation system; that is coordinated with our country's energy and environmental policies; that allows states and municipalities to set their own priorities in transportation investment; and that provides local governments more flexibility and a greater voice in influencing transportation plans that meet local needs and objectives; and to receive funds at appropriate stages;
- Federal assistance to mitigate impacts of freight rail traffic through cities and better coordination of federal regulatory authorities with local and state agencies to prevent and prepare for derailments of trains carrying hazardous or dangerous materials;
- Consistent and enhanced federal funding for community development, infrastructure, social services, and public safety programs;
- Simplifying federal application processes to provide local jurisdictions with equal and easy access to federal funding. Federal assistance in the application process should be readily accessible when needed for such programs as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnership and Emergency Shelter Grants;
- Reasonable and appropriate federal grant reporting requirements;
- A balanced approach to communication and information technology policy that allows new technologies to flourish while maintaining local regulatory and taxing authority;
- Preservation of the ability of local governments to provide communications infrastructure;
- Federal land use policies anchored by the principles of responsible federal stewardship, social responsibility, growth management and sustainable development, and respect for local authority;
- Consistent and timely responses from federal agencies that enable cities to implement their own policy and investment decisions;
- Ensuring federal agencies and their respective facilities pay city fees and charges, especially those that are necessary to support the implementation of federal mandates;
- Enact legislation that would grant states the authority they need to require sellers, regardless of location, to collect sales and use taxes owed to them per the Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement;
- Reconciling conflicts between state and federal law.

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