

League of Women Voters of the Helena Area (LWVHA)

Formal Positions

Land Use Planning and Growth in the Helena Area

History: Developed and approved in 2000 and 2002, updated in 2012

The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area recognizes that growth and development will occur in Helena, the Helena Valley, the North Hills, and surrounding areas, but strongly believes such growth should occur in ways that do not cause dangerous or unhealthy impacts on citizens, the environment, and the public infrastructure of the area, and that taxpayers should not be held responsible for funding cleanup costs or irresponsible development.

The League knows it is difficult and expensive to return contaminated ground water supplies to pristine condition and believes best management practices must be utilized before contamination occurs. We encourage the Helena City Commission, Lewis and Clark County Commission, and surrounding county and municipal government representatives to work cooperatively to provide appropriate funding and resources to support the serious planning necessary to avert septic and storm water related problems across arbitrary boundaries.

Indeed, the League supports a comprehensive strategy or growth that makes water quality a prime priority. Strong enforcement components should be included in any plan, along with a process for how proposed subdivisions will be evaluated and ruled on.

We support action that maintains or improves upon Environmental Protection Agency, State of Montana and local air quality standards. We also support expansion of the hazardous waste definition used in the state and national LWV positions to include anything that increases the toxicity levels of water and/or soil.

Transportation, telecommunications, utilities, law enforcement, fire protection and emergency services should also be adequately addressed in the planning process.

League encourages public participation in all planning, including processes for infrastructure review and zoning districts.

Water Quality in the Helena Area

History: Adopted May 2012

Located just east of the Continental Divide, the City of Helena, Montana and its surrounding valley are experiencing marked population growth with attendant proliferation of onsite waste water systems. Further, this Lake Helena Watershed is impacted by mining, fisheries, agriculture, storm water runoff, nutrients of various sorts, and drugs.

Significant concerns abound and remind us that water issues are of utmost importance in our area.

The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports:

- Water resource programs and policies that reflect the interrelationships of water quality, water quantity, groundwater and surface water and that address the potential depletion or pollution of water supplies in the Lake Helena Watershed and the surrounding Helena area;
- Measures to reduce water pollution from direct point-source discharges and from indirect nonpoint sources;
- Policies to achieve water quality essential for maintaining species populations and diversity, including measures to protect lakes, estuaries, and wetlands;
- Stringent controls to protect the quality of current and potential drinking water supplies, including protection of watersheds for surface supplies and of recharge areas for groundwater;
- Wise use of the area's water resources, while protecting existing water rights and uses, in stream flows and reservations for future needs.

Schools

History: Adopted 9/27/1982; revised 4/20/1995

We support expanded community involvement in schools, increased voter education concerning school board candidates and an update by the school administration and school board of Title IX evaluation.

County Government

History: Adopted 1/24/1984; revised 11/15/1995

The Helena LWV supports a local governing body with self-government powers (home rule) as essential for a fair and efficient government.

The following minimum provisions for a self-government charter for Lewis & Clark County:

- A clear separation of the legislative and the administrative functions;
- A part-time elected legislative body (preferably selected in nonpartisan elections) with responsibilities to make and adopt government policies for a central budgetary and revenue function and for establishing of an equitable personnel system;
- An administrative function headed by a single administrative officer (executive) (preferably appointed by the county commissioners) who appoints and removes all employees, except those directly under elected officials, and administers the personnel system;
- An amendment procedure which requires that all amendments be made by a vote of the electors;
- And, provisions to assure that all citizens be fairly represented and have opportunities for direct input to the decision-making process.

Consolidation of Local Government Services

History: Adopted 1/1992

The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area believes that the consolidation of certain local government services or function on an incremental basis is better than a complete consolidation of city and county governments into one entity.

Those areas of governmental service more appropriately handled by one local governmental agency rather than by both a city and county agency include: land management; zoning; recreation; parks; transportation; environment; public health; water; sewers; schools; libraries; law enforcement; purchasing; data processing; maintenance services; records management; payroll/bookkeeping; personnel; and legal services. Some of these services have already been wholly or partially consolidated. Others need further research and implementation in order to achieve greater efficiency, better planning, and sounder economics.

The League does not support complete consolidation of local government in Lewis and Clark County at this time because we believe that tradition and political factors would make any such proposal unlikely to attract the necessary public support. League members believe that there are no structural, representational, or fiscal barriers to designing an effective and accountable consolidated government should that become a viable option in the future.

To the extent permitted by law, local government in the county should be encouraged to share equipment, expertise, and resources in providing services to the public.

This position will not affect the ability of the LWV of the Helena Area to advocate for or against the adoption of any local government study commission by the voters of the city or county. The League board may determine that a study commission is the best means for bringing about accountable and efficient local government in keeping with this and other related League positions.

Tax Reform

History: Adopted 11/10/1992; amended 4/17/2001 and 4/17/2007

The Helena LWV supports a fair and equitable tax system, which includes giving local governments the ability to use alternative sources of revenue.