



Formal Positions of the League of Women Voters of the Helena Area

MISSION STATEMENT

The League of Women Voters (LWV), a nonpartisan political organization, promotes informed and active participation in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

TAKING ACTION AS AN INDIVIDUAL

Individual League members are always free to take action on whatever they choose, as long as they do so in their own name and leave no impression that they speak for the League.

GOVERNMENT

History: Adopted April 2024

The League supports accountable, stable city and county government with sustainable practices and policies, adequate staffing, fiscally responsible budgeting, and formalized policies for communication and citizen engagement.

Government Principles

History: Adopted April 2024

1. The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports the development of a clear process for communication between the Helena Citizens Council, citizens, and city commissioners.
2. The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports written policies and structures for residents applying for city and county boards and commissions.
3. The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports increased community opportunities to meet with city and county commissioners.
4. The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports the development and implementation of a strategic plan and a capital improvement plan by both the city and the county.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

History: Adopted April 2024

The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports increased public participation in county government through expanded use of videoconferencing meetings and development of a formal process for direct citizen communication with the commissioners.

History: Adopted September 27, 1982; revised April 20, 1995, amended April 2024

1. The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports a Lewis and Clark County governing body with self-government powers.
2. The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area believes a county charter with a clear separation of the legislative and administrative functions, headed by a single administrative officer, appointed by the county commissioners, is preferable.
3. The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports the adoption of a self-government charter for Lewis and Clark County which includes clear separation of the legislative and administrative functions. The legislative body elected in nonpartisan elections will be responsible for adopting government policies for a central budgetary and revenue function and for establishing an equitable personnel system. A single administrative officer appointed to the county commissioners will have authority to appoint and remove all employees, except those directly under elected officials and to administer the personnel system. The charter may only be amended by a vote of the electors and will include provisions to assure that all citizens are fairly represented and have opportunities for direct input to the decision-making process.

Consolidation of City and County Services

History: Adopted January 1992; revised April 2024

The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area supports the continued autonomy of the existing governments within Lewis and Clark County while supporting the inter-governmental sharing of management and maintenance of certain buildings, parks, and roads.

History of the new city and county government position and the addition of a public participation position for Lewis and Clark County Government and updates to the existing County Government and Consolidation of City and County Services.

The Helena LWV Local Government Study Committee prepared a research study of the history, structure, and operations of both the City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County governments. The study, completed in November 2023, also reviewed the histories of both government entities with the ten-year review process mandated by the Montana

Constitution. The committee held five public panel discussions and met with city and county staff to prepare their final study document which contained the information gathered during the one-year research period. The new government and county positions, and updated consolidation of city and county services positions, were prepared as a result of extensive research. The committee summarized and published the information from the study, which is available for download at the website: <http://my.lwv.org/montana>. The new positions were approved by vote of Helena League members at their annual business meeting on April 15, 2024.

LAND USE PLANNING AND GROWTH IN THE HELENA AREA

Developed and approved in 2000 and 2002; revised in 2012

The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area recognizes that growth and development will occur in Helena, the Helena Valley, North Hills and surrounding area, 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 in the area, and that taxpayers should not be held responsible for funding cleanup costs or irresponsible development.

Septic and Storm Water: 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.

Subdivision Planning/ Water Quality: Indeed, the League supports a comprehensive strategy for 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.

Air Quality/Hazardous Waste: 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.

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

Public Participation in Planning: The League encourages public participation in all planning 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 wastewater systems. Further, the 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 the 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 discharge and indirect nonpoint sources.
- Policies to achieve water quality are 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 September 1982; revised April 1995

The Helena LWV supports 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.

TAX REFORM

History: Adopted November 1992; amended April 2001 and April 2007

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