

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF AMHERST

The League will take action locally as appropriate on the State and National programs and the following Local Program. (Year position adopted in parentheses.)

LOCAL PROGRAM (2014)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT Concepts, Principles, and Practices (2003)

The League supports the following concepts, principles, and practices that make for effective local government.

We believe local government should maximize:

- a. Widespread and inclusive participation
 - Hearing of diverse points of view encourages involvement.
 - Being part of the process creates understanding and ownership of decisions.
 - Expression of various opinions promotes a sense of inclusion.

- b. Diversity of the community reflected in government
 - Accessibility fosters commitment, vitality, and fairness.
 - Diversity of opinion is more important than striving for demographic quotas.

- c. Openness and full disclosure
 - Citizens have a right to expect an open process in local government.
 - Openness early in the decision process allows citizens to be part of the process.
 - Agendas and decisions should be publicized in a timely fashion.
 - Adherence to Massachusetts Open Meeting Law must be strictly maintained.
 - Citizens have a right to expect full disclosure of the facts pertinent to the decision process.

- d. Checks and balance of power among the executive, legislative, and administrative branches of government and the electorate
 - Shared responsibility among the various branches of government creates balance.
 - Not all appointments should be made by any one branch of government.
 - Referenda opportunities make the electorate part of the process.
 - Referendum process should not be too easy or too difficult.

- e. Honesty and non-corruptibility in all decision making
 Access to decision makers should be open to all.
 Town officials and appointees should not be susceptible to undue influence or beholden to special interests.
- f. Efficiency based on professional management and timely decision making
 Efficiency is important in the delivery of essential services.
 In the policy-making process, efficiency is not as important as open and informed deliberation and citizen participation.
 All issues, including those brought up by citizen petitions and requests, should be acted upon in a timely manner so that the decision will be meaningful.
- g. Accountability for political and fiscal decisions
 Decision makers should make clear the rationale for their decisions.
 The process of implementing decisions should be clear and understandable.
 Full explanation of budget and appropriation items should be disclosed during deliberations.

STRUCTURE OF TOWN GOVERNMENT

Executive Branch (1972, 1990, 2008)

The League supports:

An overall plan for citizen boards including:

- a. A clearly-stated mission for each board.
- b. Well-defined lines of authority concerning the role of the board, the role of the support staff, and the relationship of the board with the Select Board, the Town Manager, and other Town departments.
- c. Known and clearly-defined procedures for assuring communication among boards, especially among groups of boards with common areas of concern; between boards and the Select Board, between boards and the Town Manager, and between boards and the public.
- d. An attempt to control the proliferation of boards by the use of existing boards whenever practicable and by periodic review of boards, combining them when appropriate.

Timely assignment of members of the Select Board to serve as liaisons to town committees and boards.

- a. Liaisons should obtain a sense of the committee's work by: reading agendas and minutes of committee meetings; maintaining contact with the committee chairperson; and attending committee meetings whenever possible.
- b. The liaison should communicate between the committee and Select Board by reporting as necessary and serving as a resource.

Clear procedural guidelines for conduct of business by town boards, including:

- a. Early and widely publicized notice of board meetings.
- b. Advance publicity for substantive agenda items.
- c. Draft minutes should be available to committee members and liaisons following each meeting so that minutes can be approved as the first agenda item at the subsequent meeting.
- d. Approved minutes should be filed promptly in the Select Board office.
- e. Each committee should set its own guidelines and criteria for citizen participation.
- f. Each committee should seek a balance between public input and the effective completion of the work of the committee.
- g. Regular procedure for informing public of vacancies on town boards
- h. Prompt filling of vacancies.

A program of orientation for new members of town boards

- a. The orientation process should be ongoing, formal, unbiased, and appropriate to the position.
- b. A general orientation meeting for committee members should provide appropriate documents and a basic understanding of committee process.
- c. The committee chair should be responsible for orientation of new members.

Staff assistance for town boards:

- a. Utilization of paid secretarial help.
- b. Appointment of a part-time Town Counsel, taking precautions to avoid conflict of interest.

Careful consideration of appointments and reappointments to town boards including:

- a. Provision for citizen input in the appointive process.
- b. Broadened notification for informing the public of vacancies on town boards.
- c. Policy of "no automatic reappointment".
- d. Balance between new and continuing members.

The League supports selectmen-manager form of government (1950, 1995)

Legislative Branch (1970, 1990)

The League supports:

Measures to increase the responsiveness and quality of Town Meeting:

- a. Greater visibility of Town Meeting members.
- b. Adequate information prior to Town Meetings to both Town Meeting members and citizens.

- c. More than one regularly scheduled Town Meeting each year.
- d. Utilization of committees of Town Meeting or sub-committees of the Finance Committee to consider issues in greater depth.
- e. Procedures, clearly stated and uniformly enforced, to provide for streamlined and efficient Town Meetings.
- f. Measures to increase participation in selecting representatives in all precincts by encouraging citizens to run for office and to vote.

COMPENSATION FOR MUNICIPAL SERVICES (1960)

The League supports provision of adequate compensation to the Town of Amherst for municipal services rendered to the University of Massachusetts, Hampshire College, and Amherst College.

MASTER PLANNING (1970)

The League supports measures to provide for:

- a. Sound long-range planning.
- b. Regular review and updating of zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations.
- c. Location of apartments in dispersed clusters with special attention to traffic patterns, efficient land use, and preservation of open space.
- d. Periodic review of policies on density.
- e. Preservation of open space.
- f. Regulation of septic tanks and sewer expansion.
- g. Long-range capital planning.
- h. Sound traffic planning.

TRANSPORTATION (1971)

The League supports:

Transportation planning which involves professionals and nonprofessionals at all stages.

The application of the following considerations in road planning: community goals and needs, bicycle safety, traffic circulation and control, environmental impact, social impact, source of funding.

Public transportation in Amherst.