

**THE TEXAS MUNICIPAL LEAGUE 2011 LEGISLATIVE**  
**PRIORITIES – GOVERNMENT WE NEED:**  
**SAFE COMMUNITIES, ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE,**  
**VITAL SERVICES**

Americans today have a renewed belief that “We the People” should be in control, and that government acts on the citizens’ behalf. Cities, the government closest to the people, embody this idea. Cities provide the services that we cannot do without. Those services reflect the will of the local taxpayers and can’t be lumped in with cries of “less centralized government.” City services are the nuts and bolts of our society.

Police and fire protection, the roads we drive on, local business development, the utilities we need to survive and prosper, the protection of property values through thoughtful rules that benefit everyone, and many more. These are the services that cities are called on to provide by their local citizenry. No level of government is more accountable and responsive, on a daily basis, to “We the People.”

It costs money to provide services, and city councils across the state do so in an incredibly economical way. Consider this: The average city portion of your property tax bill often costs less per month than a subscription to cable or satellite television. For that amount, the local police keep you safe from crime, emergency medical workers respond to your emergencies, clean water flows from your faucets, and much more. The portion of your property tax bill that funds city services is very low – around 17 percent on average. (The largest portion of the bill – over 50 percent – goes to fund public schools.) It is evident that keeping taxes low while meeting citizens’ demand for services has always, and will always be, a core value of city officials.

**The Texas Municipal League Legislative Program**

The TML Board of Directors met in December 2010 to establish the League’s legislative priorities for 2011. These priorities were adopted after a lengthy process designed to solicit input from a wide range of cities from across the state. The result is a legislative program that came from the League’s membership, and was ultimately approved by the League’s Board of Directors. The program focuses the League’s resources to accomplish the following goals:

1. ensure that local decisions are made locally;
2. provide funding for vital municipal services; and
3. protect and enhance essential infrastructure.

**1. Local Decision Making**

Last fall, cities throughout the state confronted the stark realities of increasing needs and limited revenue as they adopted budgets for the coming year. However, each city has a unique story to tell because of differences in size, location, demographics, mix of businesses, and combination of revenue sources. Because each city is unique, the most important legislative goal of city

elected leaders is maintaining local control and flexibility to meet the needs of their citizens, deal with a changing economy, and protect the public's safety.

The following legislative priorities focus on maintaining the ability of locally-elected officials to carry out their responsibilities to their communities:

- **Maintain the current constitutional provision limiting increases in appraised values.**
- **Maintain existing local control over tax rates.**
- **Protect local taxpayers from bearing the burden of paying for state mandates.**
- **Protect local taxpayers from paying the costs of collecting revenue for the state.**
- **Maintain local control over public property such as rights-of-way, and ensure that communities continue to be compensated for private use of public property.**
- **Maintain the current ability of cities to acquire property at a fair price for uses that benefit their citizens.**
- **Maintain the ability of local officials to protect the interests of property owners, neighborhoods, and the public in decisions regarding the permitted uses of property.**

## **2. Paying for Municipal Services**

Texas takes pride in its ranking as one of the nation's most attractive states for doing business, and Texas workers have fared better than those in most other states in recent months.

As both the state and the nation struggle to recover from the recession, municipal services are more important than ever. Even as the demand for municipal services grows, municipal revenue in many parts of Texas is threatened by the slowdown in the housing market and diminishing sales tax receipts.

If the Texas Legislature further limits the ability of cities to pay for vital services or burdens local taxpayers with unfunded mandates, our state will not be able to compete successfully for new jobs.

Having enough revenue to support new or expanding businesses is just part of the equation. Cities also must have the revenue to finance the necessary infrastructure improvements, such as new roads and extensions of water and sewer lines. Companies will not move to cities that cannot provide adequate fire protection or where workers and their families won't feel safe in their homes or on the streets of their neighborhoods.

To win the competition for jobs, Texas must offer current and potential employers safe, attractive, and livable cities. Legislatively imposed restrictions on local revenue will handcuff our state in the intense competition for new jobs and accelerate and prolong the effects of recession.

Now more than ever, Texas cities and the State of Texas must work together to ensure that our citizens continue to have the services, facilities, and job-creation environment that our people so desperately need.

### **3. Investing in Infrastructure**

If the legislature acts to further restrict revenue sources for local governments or forces local taxpayers to pay for additional state mandates, our state's infrastructure will continue to crumble and become an impediment to economic growth. Cities will cancel or defer infrastructure spending and will almost certainly stop making "local participation" donations to state highway projects.

In contrast to popular movements to limit the growth of state and federal programs and taxes, local voters continue to authorize expenditures that improve the quality of life in their cities. They do so because they recognize the benefits of investing in local infrastructure. Over the last three years, the average passage rate of municipal bond elections was almost 80-percent.

Cities aren't an example of "big government." They are an example of "right-sized government." Citizens know that their quality of life depends in large part on their city's services and infrastructure, and they are willing to pay for it.

#### **The League's Legislative Priorities:**

1. Ensure that local decisions are made locally by supporting reasonable enhancements to regulatory authority and by opposing attempts to cripple the ability of cities to:

- Obtain land for essential public purposes;
- Protect property values by imposing reasonable development standards;
- Enact zoning ordinances; and
- Respond to citizen demands for orderly and sustainable development.

2. Ensure funding for vital community services by vigorously opposing efforts to erode revenue needed to:

- Keep cities safe from crime;
- Respond to emergencies;
- Enhance economic growth and job creation;
- Provide recreational facilities and parks; and
- Protect the natural environment.

3. Protect and enhance essential infrastructure by opposing efforts to diminish municipal revenue and by supporting initiatives that will meet the needs of our cities for:

- Streets, roads, and bridges;
- Clean water;
- Safe and effective wastewater treatment;
- Stormwater management;
- Sustainable solid waste collection and disposal; and
- Public transit.

(Note: The TML Legislative Program contains almost 200 positions on various city-related issues. The complete TML legislative program is available at [www.tml.org](http://www.tml.org) or by calling the League office at 512-231-7400.)