



Grassroots Policy Development Process

The primary function of the Texas Municipal League is advocating on behalf of its member cities. That's the way it has been since the League's formation in 1913 because many significant decisions affecting Texas cities are made by the Texas Legislature, not by municipal officials. Now, just as they did over a century ago, newly elected mayors and councilmembers quickly realize the legislature can address virtually any aspect of city government.

This fact is vividly demonstrated during each legislative session. For example, during the 2023 session, more than 8,000 bills or significant resolutions were introduced; more than 1,800 of them would have affected Texas cities in some substantial way. In the end, over 1,200 bills or resolutions passed and were signed into law; 230 of them impacted cities in some way.

The number of city related bills as a percentage of total bills filed rises every year. Twenty years ago, around 17 percent of bills filed affected cities in some way. In 2023, that percentage had increased to 23 percent. In other words, almost a quarter of the legislature's work is directed at cities, and much of that work aims to limit municipal authority.

Based on a "legislative program" that is developed by member city officials, the League, through its grassroots, advocates for or against those efforts. To develop the program, city officials provide input in primarily two ways.

First, member city officials can participate in the League's "Municipal Policy Summit" during each interim. The report of the summit takes the form of a resolution that is submitted to the annual conference. The goal of the committee process is two-fold: (1) it allows input on the legislative program from a broad cross section of cities and city officials; and (2) it educates new city officials to the legislative issues faced by cities. The summit participants are appointed by the TML President based on volunteers and others chosen to balance the demographics of the TML membership at large.

The Summit is an intensive, two-day workshop during which League staff briefs the participants on the myriad legislative issues faced by cities. Most are issues that arise each session, but several consist of solicited or unsolicited issues brought by city officials. Even if no changes are recommended to the "fixed" program, which is an unlikely prospect, staff will fulfill its educational goal through continued briefing on the issues. After each subject-matter briefing, the participants make concise recommendations on the issues. Those recommendations are placed into resolution form and submitted to the League's annual business meeting, discussed next.

Second, a member city, TML region, or TML affiliate may submit a resolution for consideration at the League's annual conference. Each city is asked to provide one delegate to serve as its liaison at the meeting. The delegates are briefed on the content of the resolutions and given a chance to discuss and vote on whether they merit inclusion in the legislative program. The resolutions form the basis of a "fixed" legislative program, under which – each session – modifications to the program will be considered at a future Summit, business meeting, or TML Board meeting.

Detailed information relating to resolution submittal is provided to each member city, TML affiliate organization, and TML region well in advance of the due date.

The somewhat complex policy development process is necessary to ensure that the League advocates as directed by its members. The League is nothing without the involvement and expertise of its members, and participation in the process is an invaluable part of protecting municipal authority.

Guiding Principles

The TML approach to the 2025 session will undoubtedly be guided by principles that spring from a deeply rooted TML legislative philosophy:

- The League will vigorously oppose any legislation that would erode the authority of Texas cities to govern their own local affairs.
- Cities represent the level of government closest to the people. They bear primary responsibility for the provision of capital infrastructure and for ensuring our citizens’ health and safety. Thus, cities must be assured of a predictable and sufficient level of revenue and must resist efforts to diminish that revenue.
- The League will oppose the imposition of any state mandates that do not provide for a commensurate level of compensation.

Schedule

The League’s 2025-2026 legislative policy development schedule is roughly as follows:

October 2023 – the TML membership considered resolutions at the 2023 Annual Conference at the annual business meeting.

May 2024 – the chair, vice-chairs, board representative, and participants of the League’s Municipal Policy Summit are appointed by the TML President.

July 2024 – Municipal Policy Summit materials are distributed to the membership.

August 2024 – the Municipal Policy Summit, a two-day policy briefing at which the members made recommendations for the League’s 2025-2026 legislative program, meets.

October 2024 – the report of the Municipal Policy Summit, along with any other resolutions, will go forward to the annual business meeting at the 2023 Annual Conference.

December 2024 – the TML Board will finalize the League’s 2025-2026 legislative program based on resolutions passed in both 2023 and 2024.

Have questions or comments? Contact JJ Rocha, TML Grassroots and Legislative Services Manager, at jj@tml.org.