

Association of Washington Cities

Statement of Policy

2020

June 2020



Introduction

Washington's 281 cities and towns are home to a wide range of growing, changing, and diversifying populations. While no cities or towns are exactly alike, their leaders hold in common an unwavering commitment to delivering high-quality and reliable services that improve their residents' quality of life, and reflect their communities' priorities, values, and standards.

It is only by protecting and preserving local authority and decision-making that city leaders can govern their communities in the best interest of their residents. This core principle, along with several others, form the foundation for AWC's advocacy work across all of its policy areas.

This *Statement of Policy* document serves as a touchstone and framework for developing AWC's annual legislative priorities and positions. It articulates our core principles, the positions AWC and its members hold on fundamental municipal issues, and offers representative examples of policies that are consistent with the policy statements in each topical issue area.

AWC's *Statement of Policy* is reviewed and updated at least every six years by the State and Federal Policy Committee, which consists of city officials, appointed by AWC's President, who represent all AWC board districts. The *Statement of Policy* is adopted by the AWC membership, and affirmed annually with an opportunity for members to make floor amendments during the Business Meeting.

About AWC

AWC's mission is to serve our members through advocacy, education, and services.

AWC is a highly respected voice of cities and towns before the Legislature, Congress, government agencies, and others. We are the leader in providing valuable services and continuing education for our membership. We are the catalyst for promoting communication between cities and towns and for developing a broad public understanding of the important roles of cities and towns across the state.

AWC stands out among our peers nationwide for its innovation, robust array of member programs, and long-standing ability to retain 100% membership.

The Statement of Policy was adopted by the membership on June 25, 2020 and amended on June 24, 2021 at the AWC Annual Business Meeting.

AWC's advocacy is guided by the following core principles:

Local decision-making authority

The most effective, responsible, and responsive government is the one closest to the people. AWC works to protect "home rule" by preserving the autonomy of cities and their authority to govern their communities in the best interest of their residents. We strongly oppose policies and actions that undermine or preempt cities' authority.

Equal standing for cities

In Washington's system of shared governance, cities, counties, and the state all play essential roles. AWC is committed to ensuring that the interests and responsibilities of cities are clearly recognized, valued, and respected at all levels of government. Effectively meeting cities' needs often requires the coordination and cooperation of multiple government entities such as counties, special purpose districts, and the state. AWC advocates for the vital role cities play in local and regional alliances and supports their ability to initiate, proactively lead, and participate in strategic collaborations.

Strong Washington state partnerships

AWC is invested in building and maintaining productive working relationships among cities, counties, tribes, and state government. We work to ensure that cities are treated as equal partners with the Legislature and state agencies in formulating policy and funding decisions. AWC recognizes that statewide approaches are sometimes necessary as long as local decision-makers have the ability to tailor them appropriately.

Fiscal flexibility and sustainability

Cities are on the frontlines of protecting communities, meeting their core needs, and ensuring quality of life. AWC works to safeguard the full authority of cities to use fiscal policy and budgetary measures to ensure sustainability and prosperity. AWC strongly supports expanding cities' revenue-generation tools as well as state investment in cities. We stand in opposition to unfunded or underfunded mandates, or legislative actions that reduce revenues or create financial burdens.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

City leaders acknowledge racism and inequity exist in our communities, governments, and institutions. As racism cannot be tolerated in our communities, city leaders take seriously the responsibility to foster anti-racism and directly address racism and inequity in our policies and institutions. Cities support policy changes that eliminate systemic racism, inequity, and other disparities to build stronger and more equitable communities. AWC seeks policy opportunities as well as deliberate actions to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion for all our residents in every community. Solutions to inequities can be as unique and diverse as our community members who have been historically excluded from full benefits and participation.

Nonpartisan analysis and decision-making

To advance and protect Washington's cities, we must be guided by objective and informed analysis, and thoughtful, balanced decision-making. AWC seeks to fully discover and understand relevant facts and data, consider all points of view, and act in ways that are free from political agendas and influences.

AWC will seek to embody these core principles through our work on the specific issue areas. When this Statement of Policy is silent on a public policy issue affecting municipal government, AWC will support the provision of authority, autonomy, and resources to cities.

Issue area policy statements

Municipal finance, transparency, and governance

AWC supports transparent, accountable government and the ability for cities to have the authority, flexibility, and capacity to meet their residents' needs, with balanced and diversified funding. Cities value open government that encourages and thrives on engagement by all residents. City officials need local decision-making authority and flexibility to work with their residents on appropriate policies and solutions that fit their specific community. Cities must not be burdened by state and federal mandates that are unfunded or underfunded. AWC supports cities' ability to maintain existing funding sources as well as the ability and authority to use new funding sources that fit the needs of their communities.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Revenue preservation and diversification

- Providing greater councilmanic authority and flexibility for local revenue decisions.
- Preserving state-shared revenue streams and sequestering revenue streams to protect local taxing authority.
- Streamlining requirements that impact revenue sources including some election requirements, sunset provisions, and restrictions such as non-supplant provisions.
- Reviewing and reforming the state's tax structure with a focus on equitable, balanced, and diverse revenue options that provide adequate funding for state and local governments.

Open government

- Updating the Public Records Act so that it is efficient for cities and is accessible and timely for residents, while protecting against costly, abusive, or fraudulent requests and litigation.
- Adopting efficient, cost-effective, and innovative solutions that ensure open and accessible government, while reducing the administrative burden.

Governance

- Reviewing election requirements and the impact of ballot measures and initiatives on city government to provide greater input and information that enables efficient governance and full recognition of any impacts.
- Providing relief from undue and excessive liability exposure that creates inefficient governance and unnecessarily uses scarce resources.

Issue area policy statements

Infrastructure

AWC supports cities' ability to construct, manage, operate, maintain, and provide access to essential infrastructure that delivers a high quality of life to all residents, builds community resilience, and provides economic opportunity. AWC supports adequate and predictable state and federal investment to meet essential infrastructure needs, and the authority of cities to maintain control over public infrastructure and manage it in the most efficient way possible.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Broadband

- Recognizing and prioritizing broadband as an "essential service" and ensuring universal, reliable, high-speed access in every municipality for all residents.
- Expanding options for ownership to municipalities, nonprofits, and public-private partnerships, including pricing mechanisms (e.g., gov't-to-gov't 'e-rates').
- Providing Open Access Networks that provide choice to residents.

Utilities

- Minimizing regulatory and mandated costs on city-owned utilities that directly impact ratepayers and continuing efforts to ensure that rates remain affordable for local communities.
- Continuing to advance the use of technology in managing city utilities, including the use of Smart Grid technologies.
- Expanding access to solar energy for residential and commercial usage.

Transportation

- Ensuring adequate resources for a well-maintained local transportation system as well as a robust statewide transportation system.
- Identifying and securing additional revenue sources for local, regional, and statewide transportation needs.
- Protecting cities from discriminatory cost-sharing for state-owned routes that run through local jurisdictions.
- Supporting mass transit, regional corridor, and connector projects that enhance community mobility and quality of life.

Public works

- Developing policies and resources to help maintain and modernize water, sewer, and other public works.
- Ensuring that requirements and regulations are technically feasible and affordable.
- Enabling cities to manage public works needs in the most efficient manner possible, including flexible and reasonable contracting and procurement requirements.

Municipal buildings

- Expanding funding to maintain and upgrade municipal buildings such as libraries, fire and police stations, and community centers.

Issue area policy statements

Technology

AWC recognizes that technology is rapidly evolving, and that the role it plays within government, education, business, and residents' lives is continually expanding. AWC supports the use of technology to help cities increase efficiency, effectively and securely deliver services, manage resources, enhance community engagement, and enable open government. Access to and use of technology must recognize and respect the needs and circumstances of diverse people and communities. Sufficient state funding must be provided to ensure full access by all cities.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Innovation

- Providing support and resources to allow all cities to access innovative technology to enhance government services.

Cybersecurity

- Securing funding to provide data, training, and standards to help municipalities protect against cyber attacks and proactively implement guidelines and policies

Economic development

AWC supports the ability of cities to have the economic development tools they need to build and sustain robust and diverse local economies, encourage global competitiveness for our state, and provide economic opportunity for city residents. These tools must include appropriate state infrastructure investment programs and flexible local options, and each city needs equal access to such tools.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Funding

- Preserving equity of access to infrastructure funding, including the Public Works Assistance Account (PWAA) and Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB), and increasing the availability of low-cost loans and grants to fund infrastructure that support economic activity.
- Authorizing tax increment financing to fund public infrastructure that supports economic development.
- Encouraging state investment in economic development projects for which the increased revenue generation and return to the state is significant.
- Supporting and encouraging opportunities and funding for workforce development.

Public/private partnerships

- Establishing more public and private sector collaboration, partnerships, and joint ventures to help regions innovate and realize their unique potential.
- Creating more programs to help small businesses start, grow, and thrive.

Tourism

- Increasing marketing and other efforts to bolster tourism throughout the state.
- Preserving local authority to impose and use funds to promote tourism.
- Continuing to support policies that recognize that tourism of all kinds benefits our communities, and avoiding restrictions that limit the types of tourism that are encouraged.

Issue area policy statements

Health & human services

AWC supports meeting the public, mental, and behavioral health needs of every city's residents through strong federal, state, and county partnerships. We recognize and support the local entities that help to enable and advance these partnerships. As the state and counties work to build a community-based behavioral health system, necessitating city actions and services, they must confer with cities and provide adequate funding and support that is tailored to local needs.

AWC supports cities having the authority and resources to build community capacity and provide additional services that are tailored to address local circumstances. To address increasing demands on the human services and behavioral health systems, cities must have flexibility to pursue additional local and private resources, as well as state and federal funding.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Behavioral health

- Increasing funding and training for additional mental health professionals across the spectrum of human services.
- Expanding education, prevention, and treatment programs and services to ensure access for all communities.
- Supporting programs to reduce opioid and substance misuse and abuse.
- Expanding funding and securing dedicated revenue streams to offset the costs of providing mental health, medical, and other services for vulnerable populations (e.g., children, youth, homeless, incarcerated individuals).

Human services

- Expanding funding and securing dedicated revenue streams to support human service programs that are directly provided by cities, or have significant city input and oversight.
- Enhancing the role of cities in the policymaking and funding decisions processes.

Issue area policy statements

Public safety and criminal justice

AWC supports cities' authority and ability to respond to current and changing societal demands to protect public safety, and ensure that sufficient emergency preparedness and criminal justice resources are available for their communities. AWC recognizes the critical role cities play as first responders and the need for continued state, county, and local coordination. City officials need local decision-making authority and flexibility to work with their residents on appropriate policies and solutions that meet the needs of their communities. We support cities' ability to affect statewide public safety (including law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services) and criminal justice policy decisions that impact their communities.

AWC recognizes that individuals suffering from mental or behavioral health challenges create unique challenges for the public safety and criminal justice systems because they are not best served in a criminal justice environment. AWC supports creating greater capacity in the behavioral health care system as the best way to serve individuals in crisis. AWC supports decriminalization of mental and behavioral health challenges and providing robust behavioral health collaboration to prevent criminalization of individuals with mental illness or substance addictions.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Public safety

- Providing full funding for the Basic Law Enforcement Academy and all state-mandated law enforcement training.
- Securing funding to increase number of non-sworn officer employees to assist with community services and outreach, including support for co-responder programs that bring law enforcement and behavioral health providers together.
- Encouraging programs that build positive community relationships with police, particularly in diverse communities.
- Providing funding for necessary upgrades and replacements for inadequate essential public safety infrastructure, including 911 and interoperability.
- Exploring options to efficiently and cost-effectively provide fire and emergency medical services to communities, including through the use of technology and interlocal cooperation.
- Investing in prevention and intervention programs to reduce criminal activity.
- Pursuing expansion of mental health outreach services outside of the criminal justice system.

Criminal justice

- Increasing local rehabilitation program capacity, funding diversion programs, and alternative court models.
- Providing support to ensure access to justice and indigent defense services.
- Establishing programs that support pre- and post-arrest diversion opportunities for individuals experiencing behavioral health challenges as well as misuse and abuse of substances.

Emergency management

- Providing resources and technical support to build local emergency preparedness and response capacity.
- Streamlining the flow of funding and resources during emergencies.
- Supporting cities' ability to continue broad-based planning and training for response to emergencies of all types.

Issue area policy statements

Human resources

AWC recognizes the vital role of public sector employees in serving our communities. AWC supports cities' efforts to be responsible employers that provide a quality work environment, and that can attract and maintain a robust, highly-qualified, and fairly-compensated workforce throughout all economic cycles. Given that human resource-related expenses account for a substantial portion of municipal budgets, AWC supports cities having broad discretion to manage their workforces and establish sustainable approaches to managing related costs.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Workforce

- Ensuring pay and benefit equity for public sector employees, while balancing city fiscal conditions.
- Ensuring that cities have the flexibility to make staffing decisions to respond to fiscal realities and the needs of their communities.
- Providing meaningful participation for cities in decisions regarding human resources policies that impact city budgets and workforces.

Pensions

- Maintaining reasonable and predictable pension contribution rates and costs.
- Minimizing financial impacts of pension benefit and pension system changes.
- Providing cities with meaningful input in the decision-making process for the pension system.

Labor relations

- Ensuring that fiscal sustainability and city priorities are considered as part of funding and policy decisions regarding labor relations and collective bargaining requirements.
- Ensuring cities are provided broad authority to manage their personnel and personnel-related costs, including health care and other benefits.

Issue area policy statements

Land use & housing

Management of land use within a city is a core function of community self-governance. AWC recognizes the benefit of clearly defined state goals that guide local land use, economic development, transportation, and public facility planning, as long as they are implemented through locally determined processes and regulations and allow for local decision-making. AWC supports policies that encourage the growth of cities in ways that more efficiently provide and maintain necessary infrastructure and services, and that are achieved through state growth and annexation policies, and financing. AWC supports the authority of cities to manage local and regional growth, to conduct local land use planning and zoning, and to establish and update local development regulations and housing policies. AWC supports a shared and equitable responsibility for all cities to accept and accommodate a growing population and supports the authority of cities to determine how best to manage that growth as appropriate for the growth rate, size, and character of each community. AWC will work to provide tools to support growth and densification that are appropriate for various sizes of communities.

AWC supports housing policies that give cities the authority and tools required to promote the development of housing that meets their unique needs, including emergency shelters, transitional and permanent supportive housing, affordable housing, and workforce housing. AWC opposes policies that do not recognize that housing development in any community involves a complex mix of factors, including the unique role that city governments play in facilitating housing development, and the roles of other parties. AWC opposes policies that attempt to address housing challenges through micromanagement of city decision-making.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Growth Management Act (GMA)

- Supporting approaches that preserve local control and plan for balanced growth as determined by each region.
- Maintaining and increasing state and local resources that are directed towards providing necessary infrastructure to support population growth, while supplying and retaining adequate affordable housing.

Affordable housing

- Supporting policies and resources that create sufficient, quality, and affordable housing for diverse constituents (e.g., workforce, low income, seniors, disabled, homeless) and removing barriers to creating an adequate and diverse housing supply.
- Maintaining and increasing resources to address unmet housing needs, including funds for shelters, transitional and permanent housing for moderate- and low-income, homeless, farm worker, and special needs populations.
- Increasing funding for programs that support the development of affordable housing.

Issue area policy statements

Environment

AWC supports a commitment to environmental stewardship, which includes the regulation and protection of our air, water quality, water quantity, climate, ecosystems, stormwater, and solid waste systems. We recognize that a balanced bold approach is essential if we are to simultaneously protect the environment, allow for expanding populations, and provide necessary economic and social opportunities. Ecological improvements are coming too slowly for species vital to Washington State. Bold leadership and vision are needed to improve ecological functions as part of our future.

AWC supports reasonable and bold reforms to the state environmental regulatory system that adhere to the principles of effectiveness, simplicity, fairness, equity, and balance. All reforms and policies must also recognize the financial needs and capacity of cities and their residents, and not infringe upon cities' ability to reflect local priorities and economies. Federal, state, and county agencies that rely on new and existing city actions to protect the environment must adequately support cities with funding and technical assistance that is tailored to fit local needs and circumstances.

Examples of policies consistent with this approach include:

Climate change

- Supporting statewide carbon reduction efforts that meet the principles described above.
- Encouraging and providing resources for community sustainability and resilience planning.
- Enabling and supporting locally based carbon emission reduction efforts.
- Investing in efforts to build a "Green Economy."

Water and air quality

- Enhancing water and air quality programs, which must include cost and technical support considerations for implementation by individual communities and be tailored to meet local needs.
- Supporting water conservation and management tools that enhance flexibility and enable cities to continue to grow while making the best use of limited resources, including developing long-term regional water supply plans.
- Developing and funding a comprehensive approach to fish habitat restoration.

Solid and hazardous waste

- Increasing recycling/reuse programs.
- Supporting product stewardship programs.

Regulatory reform

- Streamlining outdated regulatory systems (e.g., SEPA and permitting) to reduce administrative costs and barriers while maintaining environmental protection.



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