

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BROWN COUNTY COUNTY FISCAL AND DEVELOPMENT POSITION

Executive Summary: At their 2013 Annual Meeting, members of the League of Women Voters of Brown County discussed the need for a study of the fiscal management and developmental decision-making provided by Brown County's elected officials, in order to define a League position on the county's fiscal health and economic development management. Their concerns were phrased as a Study Question: **How is Brown County's fiscal viability advanced or hindered, based on the accountability, transparency and coordination with which the County's elected and appointed officials approach financial and developmental decision-making?**

The League completed its Fiscal and Development Study in the spring of 2017. Since then, we have held a consensus meeting (July 13, 2017) and a concurrence meeting (December 6, 2017) to define our positions. This process is now complete as of January 19, 2018.

Through the study of Brown County's fiscal health and developmental approach, the League of Women Voters of Brown County has identified many steps the county can take to enhance operational management, transparency and accountability, fiscal management, planning and development, and Board management. A well-founded strategy for implementing these steps, some of which have recently been taken or are underway, will build public awareness of county operations, and foster public understanding of where our financial resources come from, how they are spent, and how assets and constraints impact the county. We recommend the County Commissioners and County Council take a clear leadership position to ensure adoption of best practices within all county agencies, departments and boards, as permitted within statutory guidelines.

Operational Management: As elected officials come and go, the county can help to build a strong base of employee professionalism, ensure continuity in procedures, and foster public confidence by implementing and expanding good management practices. The League recommends that the Commissioners and Council work to implement these across county government, including themselves. The League believes that the public would welcome periodic reports on progress towards implementation of these practices that could usefully be linked to the annual budget hearings. Appropriate practices could include:

1. Maintaining and updating an overall Personnel Policy for the county
2. Establishing updated and detailed job descriptions
3. Maintaining SOP and Best Practices manuals for every department
4. Defining training requirements and ensuring training is funded and completed
5. Defining and advertising employee qualifications and selection process
6. Defining a consistent Performance Review Process
7. Requiring ethics training/certification for county employees and appointees
8. Requiring Departments to set performance goals and deadlines with respect to 1-7 above and to their respective duties and responsibilities.

Transparency and Accountability: Accountability and transparency in management of public moneys are a pillar of good government. The League encourages the county to foster citizens' understanding of the sources of revenues and expenditures by making financial and operational data available and accessible. Recommended means include but are not limited to:

1. Each department includes a fiscal and operations report for the prior year(s) as part of its presentation at the annual budget hearings.
2. The county holds town hall presentations annually on fiscal and operational management and on performance goals substantively, to include changes in taxes, whether there are significant deficits/surpluses, and what unexpected costs or revenues have been registered.
3. The county explores making Budgetary Status Reports available online as "read only" documents, linking operations to expenditures to date.

Fiscal Management: To ensure the efficient and effective use of available resources and boost public confidence in fiscal management, the League encourages the Commissioners and Council, on an ongoing basis, to do (or continue) the following:

1. Further study health insurance and defined benefits for employees to minimize indefinite liabilities, and explore best wellness and outcome options
2. Respect individual funds and accounts' stated purpose (ie, no shifting of employees or costs to different accounts each year wherever there is some unassigned money)
3. Assess current tax policy, pros and cons, particularly the balance between property and income taxes
4. Study further ways for the county and the town of Nashville to work together to save money, improve efficiency and avoid redundancy
5. Invite periodic public debate on "right-sizing" our local government, county, town and townships.

Planning and Development: Strategic planning is the foundation for successful development. League recommendations to County Commissioners and County Council include:

1. Recognize, protect and incorporate Brown County's many assets in planning. Use vision documents such as Vision 2020.
2. Develop a joint County-Town 5 year plan with incremental steps tied to resources
3. Seek opportunities for public-private cooperation to assist with development and planning including investment from private interests, and state and federal assistance from OCRA and other sources.
4. Continue to update and maintain zoning ordinances in concert with updating the Comprehensive Plan with full public discussion and input. Include fire protection, water, high-speed affordable internet and sewer in the new Comprehensive Plan.
5. Seek community input across a broad range of voices and demographic groups.

6. Build periodic data collection into planning and execution to enhance assessment of initiatives (including against the Community Vitality Indicators) and to better inform communication and feedback among stakeholders.

Board Management: An established and consistent reporting and assessment system for county Boards and Commissions is essential to effective management. Boards and Commissions have historically attracted a small number of citizens, resulting in the same individuals being represented on multiple bodies at the same time or consecutively. The League recommends that County Commissioners, the County Council and other appointive entities provide leadership by establishing goals and direction, empowering their organizations, while driving accountability. Within statutory authority, recommendations to County Council and County Commissioners include:

1. Enhance recruitment efforts for appointive bodies, including seeking out a demographically broader range and number of appointees. The League recommends a policy to ensure that incumbents seeking reappointment should compete equally with new applicants and not automatically be reappointed.
2. Define qualifications of membership and participation requirements
3. Develop 5 year plans, as appropriate, annual goals, incremental steps for execution, and resource implications.
4. Ensure boards report quarterly to appointive bodies and the public on goal status, progress and continuous improvement plans.