

2021 City of Roanoke Legislative Program

Fiscal Policy

Any proposed comprehensive tax reform must be based on the fundamental principle that local revenue sources cannot be further limited or restricted by the General Assembly without the enactment of legislation that will authorize localities to establish meaningful and viable alternative sources of local revenue.

The General Assembly must vigilantly and effectively avoid enactment of any further unfunded mandates to localities and initiate procedures to review, assess, and eliminate existing and burdensome unfunded mandates imposed on localities. Unfunded mandates include mandatory tax exemptions or reductions to specific groups of individuals, as worthy and deserving as they may be.

Technology and Infrastructure Policy

The General Assembly should eliminate impediments facing localities from bringing 21st Century technology to their citizens.

The Commonwealth and the City must develop partnerships among federal, state, and local constituencies to expand highway infrastructure development throughout Virginia's Blue Ridge Region, including the expansion of I-73, which incorporates improving the safety and economic development worthiness of US Rte. 220.

Environmental Policy

The City opposes any efforts by the General Assembly to mandate further exemptions from payment of local stormwater utility fees. In addition, the City requests the General Assembly to hold localities harmless from any costs associated with increases in the load of sediment and other pollutants of concern that enter waters of the Commonwealth, including rivers, streams, and tributaries, where such increases in the Total Maximum Daily Load for a locality are attributable to projects and developments approved by the Commonwealth that include crossings of bodies of water within the Commonwealth.

The City supports legislation to promote the generation and use of renewable energy, including expanding the authority of localities to enter into power purchase agreements with utilities for the generation of electricity through solar power.

The City encourages socially responsible investments, including investments in renewable energy, by VRS and all other funds invested by the Commonwealth.

The City supports energy efficiency and renewable energy programs for public transportation services statewide, emphasizing the need for more equitable, accessible, and cleaner transportation options.

Economic Development Policy

The City encourages the General Assembly to maintain existing tools, including historic tax credits, to encourage development and redevelopment throughout the City and Virginia's Blue Ridge Region.

The City supports continuation and increased funding for the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund (COF). This important economic development incentive program has played a major role in several Roanoke job-creation projects. The COF is an essential tool in competing with other states which often offer lucrative incentive packages to prospective companies.

The City encourages the General Assembly to refrain from enacting further limitations on planning, development, and zoning tools that localities may use in regulating and promoting development within their communities.

Public transportation is an important economic development tool for the regional economy. The General Assembly should increase funding for transit services and create opportunities for regional localities to collaborate in expanding public transportation throughout the region.

Education Policy

The City of Roanoke and Roanoke City Public Schools strongly urge the General Assembly to amend current school funding programs to fully fund its obligations under the Standards of Quality (SOQ) by securing a sustainable state revenue source to assist localities and school divisions to provide more equitable educational opportunities for all Virginia students. These revenue streams should be dedicated to modernizing and maintaining public school facilities and ensuring adequate funding for updating curricula to correct historical inaccuracies and to reflect the history and culture of students of all backgrounds represented in the Commonwealth. This recommendation will require amendments to establish transparent criteria for equitable distribution of such funding, including funding to support the technology needed to meet the Standards of Learning (SOL) requirements and enhance learning by all children.

Public Safety Policy

The City supports legislation that preserves law and order and promotes public safety throughout the City, including legislative initiatives that provide funding to assist localities in protecting the public from gun violence.

The City supports legislation to enable localities to enact ordinances that exceed statewide standards with respect to the sale, possession, storage, and carrying of firearms and ammunition.

The City emphasizes the importance of continuous criminal justice reform and the establishment of appropriate standards for law enforcement to protect the civil rights of citizens. Further, the Commonwealth and City must expand the meaning of well-being and community safety to include education, economic opportunity, rehabilitation, and other support initiatives.

The Governor and General Assembly should ensure that additional funds are provided to sufficiently support these efforts alongside law enforcement.

Civil and Voting Rights Policy

The City supports the repeal of Article I, Section 15-A of the State Constitution regarding marriage.

The City emphasizes the importance of keeping constituents aware and informed on their civil rights and liberties, most especially their right to vote. Thus, the City supports all efforts at making voting as accessible and equitable as possible.

Community Policy

The City supports measures to ensure a statewide living wage that incorporates the value of benefits to promote the health and well-being of workers and their families.

The City supports legislation to promote healthcare for all Virginians, including reproductive healthcare, free from discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

The City supports legislation to address the health issues presented by vaping.

2021 VML Legislative Program

The City endorses and supports the 2021 VML Legislative Program and VML Policy Committee Statements.

2021 Legislative Priorities

The City requests its legislative delegation to patron and support the following legislative initiatives:

1. Amend City Charter to conform Charter to November election schedule.

This proposal requires Council to propose charter changes to the General Assembly after advertising and conducting a public hearing.

2. Establish real estate lien status and priority for unpaid local solid waste collection fees in a manner similar to the lien for unpaid stormwater utility fees.

This proposal requires an amendment to Section 15.2-928.

3. Adopt amendments to the State Budget to continue funding increases for community mental health programs and facilities.

This recommendation will require commitments to maintain funding levels and implementation of programs for the current State budget and subsequent two-year budgets.

4. Adopt legislation to enable localities to establish a ticket diversion program to allow bicyclists who are cited for traffic violations to receive safety training in lieu of paying a fine.

This recommendation will require amendments to Title 46.2, Subtitle III of the Code of Virginia.

5. Adopt amendments to the Code of Virginia to clarify mitigation of impacts to water quality by new and redevelopment sites. Local regulations of site development face challenges arising from ambiguous provisions in state regulations. Best Management Practices should include specific, understandable regulations with respect to water-quality issues.

This recommendation may require amendments to current rules, in addition to changes to the Code of Virginia.

6. Adopt amendments to Section 15.2-922 (A) to authorize localities to require retrofitting of buildings containing one or more dwelling units to install and maintain smoke alarms. This type of amendment has been implemented with respect to schools, juvenile care facilities, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes.

This recommendation requires amendments to Section 15.2-922 (A).

7. Adopt legislation to allow localities to designate “No Smoking” areas in outdoor parks, including within 100 feet of recreation centers, outdoor playgrounds, and sports fields.

This recommendation will require an amendment to Section 15.2-2826.

8. Enact measures to fully fund: (i) the Standards of Quality (SOQ) to include a sustainable state funding source to assist localities and school divisions in modernizing public school facilities; (ii) programs for special needs; (iii) enhancements to teacher compensation; and (iv) to secure and implement curricula which reflect the history and culture of students of all backgrounds represented in the Commonwealth, to provide more equitable educational opportunities for all Virginia students.

This recommendation will require amendments to current school funding programs to secure a reliable source of revenue and establish transparent criteria for equitable distribution of such funding. Fully funding the SOQ requirements by the General Assembly will necessarily include funding for much-needed

modernization of school infrastructure. Fully funding programs for special needs, enhancing teacher compensation, and ensuring the presence of curricula reflecting the history and culture of students of the many and varied backgrounds represented in the school divisions will provide for more equitable educational opportunities for all our children throughout the Commonwealth.

9. Continue supporting a fund and grant program relating to intervention and prevention of violence in our communities.

This recommendation will require commitments to maintain funding levels and implementation of programs for the current State budget and subsequent two-year budgets.

10. Adopt amendments to the Code of Virginia to allow localities to transfer blighted properties directly to a land bank entity created by the locality or an existing nonprofit entity designated by the locality to carry out the functions of a land bank entity in lieu of sale at public auction for unpaid real estate taxes and other liens held by the locality.

This recommendation will require amendments to Section 58.1-3970.1.

11. Adopt Senate Bill No. 5016 relating to the application of parole statutes and Senate Bill No. 5046 relating to limitation on mandatory minimum punishment.

These Bills were introduced in the 2020 General Assembly Session by Senator Edwards and passed by indefinitely in the Senate Judiciary Committee with a letter to the Crime Commission requesting that they be studied further. This recommendation will require approval of legislation that will be reintroduced before the General Assembly in 2021.