



City of Independence, Missouri 2024 State Legislative Agenda

The 2024 City of Independence State Legislative Agenda is a policy document expressing the positions of the City of Independence for the 2024 Missouri General Assembly Session. It is not intended to be either an exclusive or an all-inclusive document, but rather captures the major policy positions of the City. In general, the City of Independence supports local control of issues that local governments are best positioned to address for the needs of their local constituents and welcomes regional cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The following are the top legislative priorities for the City of Independence for the 2024 legislative session. The corresponding pages in the policy provide additional information:

1. The City opposes any changes to Economic Development tools, such as Community Improvement Districts (CID) that would hamper development and redevelopment. (Page 3).
2. The City opposes any reductions, caps or altering of the local sales tax rate. (Page 4).
3. The City opposes any legislation that takes away the right of cities to manage public rights of way in regard to pole attachments or to charge fees to telecommunication and video service providers that use the public right of way (Page 6)
4. The City supports increased funding for mental health services in Independence and Eastern Jackson County. (Page 6)
5. The City supports funding support for City Tourism Assets including enhancements to the Historic Preservation Tax Credit (Page 3).

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STATE LEGISLATIVE POLICY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Business Incubation

The City supports legislation that promotes startup businesses, including business opportunities for graduates from the Ennovation Center. The Independence Regional Ennovation Center formerly housed the Independence Regional Hospital. In 2007 the hospital announced its closure, and community leaders worked together to repurpose the building. The Ennovation Center opened in 2010 and has housed over 60 startup businesses. Resources are needed to help tenants graduate into expansion spaces within the community. Research confirms that new and young businesses create most of the new jobs nationwide.

Financing Tools

The City opposes any changes in state law that would restrict the flexibility of cities to use financing tools to promote economic development in their communities. The ability to utilize Community Improvement Districts (CID), Chapter 353 tax abatement, and Transportation Development Districts (TDD) is critical for development and redevelopment in Independence. This is especially true in blighted or distressed areas that would not otherwise support investment at market rates. These tools are essential to communities throughout Missouri when engaging in public improvement and economic development projects.

Historic Preservation Tax Credit

The City supports the Historic Preservation Tax Credit. Independence has a thriving tourism industry built upon its rich historical heritage and resources. The State Historic Preservation Tax Credit is a key tool to preserve and protect the community's historic assets. Taxpayers may access credits equal to 25% of the eligible costs of rehabilitation of historic structures. Studies have shown that for every one dollar of tax credit issued there has been approximately four dollars of reinvestment.

Pay Day Loans

The City supports legislation to control payday loan interest rates. The City has zoning codes to limit the number and types of businesses that profit from loaning money to low-income people. The City supports legislation to cap the amount of interest that may be charged by payday and car title loan companies. According to the State Commissioner of Finance's report to the Governor, the average interest rate for payday loans in Missouri in 2023 is 365.07%.

FINANCE

Sales Tax Caps

The City opposes legislation to limit or cap sales tax rates. In 1980 Missouri voters approved the "Hancock Amendment" to the Missouri Constitution Article X Section 22. This provision states that a majority of the qualified voters of the political subdivision must vote to approve any increases in local taxes. In the last several years several bills were filed that would cap or otherwise alter sales taxes. This legislation would tie the hands of local leaders in addressing future needs and could result in the reduction or elimination of City services that our citizens require and have come to expect.

Sales Tax Exemptions

The City opposes legislation to expand sales tax exemptions. In 2016, voters approved a constitutional amendment to prohibit local governments from asking voters to expand sales taxes beyond goods. It is important to preserve the existing tax base to ensure stable local revenues to deliver crucial municipal services. Further exemptions threaten to erode revenues generated by retail sales.

Unfunded Mandates

The City opposes legislation that impose state mandated costs for which there is no guarantee of local reimbursement or other related benefits. The City welcomes open dialogue with members of the General Assembly regarding the burden of unfunded mandates on the daily operations of local governments.

MUNICIPAL COURT

Appropriate Fines

The City supports legislation to raise municipal court fines to \$500 in order to be a deterrent to criminal behavior and offset the staff time dedicated to processing criminal offenses.

The City has experienced increased numbers of serious violations, including fraudulent use of credit cards, bad checks, assaults, and stealing cases that are now handled in municipal court. The City supports raising fines up to \$1,000 for cases that could be filed as felonies, such as possession of methamphetamines, possession of heroin and car thefts. Municipal courts in Jackson County are processing more of these serious offenses.

Driver's License Suspension

The City supports legislation to allow municipal courts to suspend driver's licenses for offenders who fail to pay court fines and/or appear in court. Several loopholes exist in state law which allow those found guilty of certain "minor traffic violations" to avoid compliance with judicial renderings in municipal court, thereby eliminating any real incentive for an offender to comply with state and local laws. With the passage of Senate Bill 5 in 2015, municipal courts lost much of their enforcement authority, including the ability to suspend in-state driver's licenses for non-compliance with judgments. In the past four years, Independence has experienced a considerable decline in compliance. This poses a real threat to public safety since traffic offenders understand they can ignore tickets and judge's verdicts with little consequence. This is especially important to communities like Independence with multiple major state and federal highway routes.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Crisis Intervention Teams

The City supports legislation for sustainable funding and partnerships to expand Crisis Intervention Teams for local law enforcement. Crisis Intervention Teams (CITs) are police officers trained to safely respond to persons with mental illness in crisis. As a result, those persons receive appropriate access to emergency, inpatient, and community-based mental health treatment services instead of jail time. The Independence Police Department currently has grant funding to support one CIT officer, but the need far exceeds this single resource and finite funding stream. Based on a recent Community Health Assessment and feedback received through the Community Health Improvement Planning process, the Independence Health Department identified mental health as one of the top health priority areas for Independence.

Felony Fleeing

The City supports Felony Fleeing legislation to ensure accountability for those who endanger others by fleeing from police. Police pursuits pose an inherent danger to the safety of citizens, as well as to the officers involved in the pursuits. Often accidents occur after police terminate an active pursuit but the suspect continues at a high rate of speed. Police departments like

Independence have restrictive policies which balance the inherent risk of pursuit with the need to apprehend suspects who may commit more serious crimes if they evade arrest. The City of Independence utilizes the new StarChase technology to insert a GPS tracking device in lieu of pursuing a vehicle that flees. However, the technology is expensive and cannot be implemented in every situation. Stronger laws are needed to impose sufficient penalties to deter flight and to place responsibility on suspects who flee.

Mental Health

The City supports increased funding for Mental Health Services in our community. 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 6 youth in the United States experience a mental health disorder each year. The 2022 Independence Health Assessment indicated that Mental Health was one of the top public health concerns by our residents. Independence has a higher suicide rate than Eastern Jackson County, Kansas City, the State of Missouri, and the United States in 2020.

Ground Emergency Medical Transportation

The City of Independence supports legislation that would provide reimbursement for any agency that provides emergency medical transport services for a particular area. This legislation would allow the City of Independence to appreciate these funds from the state of Missouri through the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) if it chose to provide this service in the future.

TOURISM

Short-Term Rentals

The City opposes any legislation that would limit the authority of local governments to regulate short-term rentals. Communities like Independence are increasingly seeing owner-occupied homes used as short-term rentals for short-term stays through websites such as Airbnb and VRBO. Short-term housing can benefit local economies by increasing tourism and the affordability of housing. Cities need flexibility to regulate short-term rentals in a way that best meets the needs of the local community.

UTILITIES

Video Services and Telecommunications Issues

The City opposes any legislation to limit local control of telecom attachments to municipally owned utility facilities. The City also opposes any legislation that would diminish the ability of local governments to charge fees to telecommunication and video service providers that use

public rights of way to deliver their products and services. Independence Power & Light has the responsibility of managing the safe and reliable delivery of electrical power to Independence ratepayers. This mission is often complicated by the competing needs of telecommunications companies that seek to attach to utility poles and related rights-of-way and infrastructure. The City has worked closely with telecommunications providers to develop new ordinances and applications to accommodate small cell wireless attachments on utility poles. The City must maintain authority to impose reasonable regulations to protect its assets and the public interest. In addition, flexibility is necessary to impose fees to recoup the costs of maintenance, inspections, plan reviews, etc. and to ensure the private business costs of telecommunications and video service companies are not displaced to the citizens of Independence.