

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY DURANGO CITY GOVERNMENT

It is the consensus of the League of Women Voters of La Plata County that the present Council-Manager form of government in the City of Durango is structurally sound; however, modifications should be incorporated to make it functionally more responsive to the citizens. The recommended modifications are:

Full Financial Disclosure. Improvement in two areas is necessary:

1. Finance Committee. Positions on the finance committee should be advertised so that citizens are given every opportunity to participate on this important committee. Rotating membership, with a combination of new members and old members each year, is recommended. With new members each year, the committee will not be so likely to become stale. There would be fresh ideas and enthusiasm each year. Also, if the Finance Committee is actively functioning, two or three years of service on the committee are all that should be asked of a member. It would not be a good idea, however, to have an entirely new committee each year. A few experienced members can help to guide the committee. There should be a limited number of years of service on the committee; three years should be the maximum.
2. Budget and Financial Reports. The annual budget should be made available for public review at least one month before adoption. It takes a great deal of in-depth study to be able to understand and appraise a budget. Presenting a budget one week and adopting it the next week excludes citizen participation. A summary of the budget can be facilitated with simplified graphic presentation. Monthly financial reports, including a list of vendors and the amount of business done with each should be available for citizen review at City Hall. A general financial statement should be published at least quarterly and preferably monthly in the news media.

Inter-governmental Cooperation. It was the consensus that inter-governmental cooperation should be encouraged. It was felt that areas of agreement should be formalized so that changes in City Council members and County Commissioners will not jeopardize existing cooperation.

Citizen Information. All City Council and board meetings must be publicized and open to the public. There should be a regular, consistent place for notices in the newspaper, e.g., a local government column. Each board chairman must know his/her responsibility to publicize every meeting. Governmental officers should press the media for earlier, more thorough coverage. Adequate notice of meetings should be given; and radio should be used to assure that those who do not take the newspapers will be informed. We note that Durango City Council meetings are now televised on CitySpan10.

Citizen Participation. To assure that everyone has an opportunity to serve on city boards or commissions, vacancies should be advertised by both radio and newspapers. There should be a consistent set of requirements for selecting members of committees. Committees and boards should have consistent rules of procedure and bylaws. A list of vacancies should be published periodically. Having the same people serve on several committees (city, county, state and regional) should be discouraged. Candidates should be actively sought through local community organizations. There should be a public forum to bring up public issues and discuss decisions before every City Council meeting, with at least fifteen minutes allowed. If sufficient interest is generated, a town meeting should be held periodically upon request to the Council to establish the

criteria for such a meeting. To increase interest in city government, the Council should be encouraged to have a more receptive attitude toward the public. The Council room should be changed to make it more open and comfortable. The raised dais should be eliminated.

Budget and Finance. Expenditures should be posted and published in an easy-to-read format. The budget should be readily available to the public. Auditors should be changed frequently and hired from local firms. The Council should hold public informational meetings before voting on the report of the Budget and Finance Committees. Reimbursement procedures should be facilitated and improved.

Council members. Council members should be paid more; but first, there should be a survey of similar towns to determine the amount.

This position, originally adopted in the 1980s, was reaffirmed at the Annual Meeting, May 11, 2004.