

EL DORADO

K A N S A S

TO: City Commission
FROM: David Dillner, City Manager
SUBJ: Federal and State Legislative Agenda
DATE: December 15, 2021

The City of El Dorado supports the concept of local home rule, which places accountability and decision making at the level of government closest to the people. Varying demographics and values make it difficult to adopt a “one size fits all” solution to social, economic, and political issues occurring throughout the nation and state. Therefore, the City of El Dorado advocates for a limited federal and state role in the affairs of its citizens.

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

American Rescue Plan Funds. The City of El Dorado will receive \$1.9 million in federal American Rescue Plan funds in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The City supports a continued, flexible regulatory framework to allow municipalities to implement the funds in a manner that allows for the best means of local recovery and long-term prosperity as determined by each community. Unnecessary reporting or burdensome regulations will discourage use of funds towards far-reaching efforts that will make communities stronger.

Public Infrastructure Funding. The City supports federal funding programs and initiatives that assist local governments with the provision of essential public services that would otherwise create a significant burden to local residents. The City supports any efforts to streamline federal regulations that discourage the use of federal funds or that significantly increase project costs.

Usefulness and Safety of El Dorado Lake. The City supports any efforts by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to make El Dorado safer and more useful to the public who visit the lake for recreational purposes. The City understands that a plan exists that guides the operations and maintenance of the lake.

For example, the plan provides direction on the placement of buoys to mark areas of danger around the lake, particularly around the Shady Creek Marina. The buoys have not been installed for a number of years, making it difficult for boaters to know where underwater trees lurk below the surface. Boaters may damage their watercraft from hitting these hidden dangers. In addition, the City advocates for the removal of underwater deadwood to open up additional recreational boating opportunities and to improve safety for boaters.

The City of El Dorado advocates for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to consider opportunities to leverage El Dorado Lake as an economic opportunity for the State of Kansas and the

surrounding region. The federal government, through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, legally owns the real property surrounding El Dorado Lake. The City desires to facilitate the development of amenities that capitalize on the lake, such as a destination lodge or other outdoor attractions similar to other Corps lakes. The City of El Dorado supports any efforts by the federal government to allow such development to promote and grow outdoor tourism in El Dorado.

El Dorado Lake Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Expenses. The City of El Dorado receives an annual invoice from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers concerning operational and maintenance expenses necessary to support El Dorado Lake. The City desires to have a better understanding of the annual capital and maintenance projects done by the Corps of Engineers at El Dorado Lake. The City also seeks an opportunity to participate in the planning process for such projects to ensure that its interests are represented. Engagement also allows the City to budget for its O&M expenses over several years.

Lake Debt Forgiveness. The City of El Dorado currently owes \$57 million to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for lake storage capacity at El Dorado Lake. This principle amount increases annually by 3.502% until the City activates additional storage space and begins making principal and interest payments. The outstanding obligation represents a debt burden per household of approximately \$12,700. The obligation will increase to over \$400 million by 2081 (equal to nearly \$90,000 per household) if El Dorado does not activate additional storage space and begin making payments before the debt obligation reaches maturity.

Nearly 50% of El Dorado's population is eligible for the free or reduced lunch program, making this debt burden a difficult hurdle to the community's overall prosperity. The City advocates for an opportunity to modify the obligation terms of its inactivated lake storage capacity. For example, changing the compounding interest to simple interest saves El Dorado citizens approximately \$287 million over the remaining life of the debt and makes repayment more tenable. The City also supports opportunities to explore financial relief from the debt burden that will enable the City to invest in its residents instead of diverting much-needed resources to the federal government.

Law Enforcement Reform. This past year, law enforcement practices have come under increasing scrutiny throughout the nation. The City supports an assessment of law enforcement practices, although advocates for an approach that considers local context. Many police departments, including the El Dorado Police Department, operate with integrity while serving the community. Federal regulation in law enforcement should provide flexibility that allows communities to implement community-appropriate, equitable strategies that best serve the community's interest.

STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The City of El Dorado supports the legislative priorities of the League of Kansas Municipalities, especially as it relates to the Home Rule Amendment of the Kansas Constitution. The City supports locally elected officials making decisions on behalf of their communities, particularly

over local tax and revenue decisions. To that end, the City of El Dorado supplements the League's Statement of Municipal Policy with an emphasis on the following local legislative priorities.

Transportation Funding. The City of El Dorado supports efforts to fund transportation projects to maintain and enhance the State's transportation system. The City appreciates funding presently appropriated to the Kansas Department of Transportation to assist communities with obligations to provide a safe and efficient transportation network to serve Kansans and inter-state commerce. The City advocates for the continuation of the City Connecting Link Improvement Program (CCLIP), Transportation Alternatives (TA), Federal Funds Exchange Program, Cost Share Program, and other transportation programs.

The City of El Dorado also supports the funding of regionally significant transportation priorities of South Central Kansas, to include improvements to the North Junction near Wichita, Kansas. The City has defined its primary local transportation project as the intersection of K-254/I-35/Boyer Road, which has become a major node in the Wichita region's transportation network.

Wildlife and Parks Funding. El Dorado Lake sits directly adjacent to the corporate limits of the City of El Dorado. The lake provides many recreational benefits to the community. According to the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism, El Dorado Lake is the most visited reservoir in the State of Kansas. Many people throughout the region visit El Dorado Lake each year to hunt, fish, camp, and generally enjoy the great outdoors.

The City of El Dorado supports any efforts to enhance funding to the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism, and further encourages the State of Kansas to invest in its recreational facilities. The City also supports any efforts to leverage El Dorado Lake as an economic opportunity for the State of Kansas and the surrounding region.

Blighted Properties. The City advocates for legislation to streamline the process for addressing abandoned and blighted properties. The City understands the need to balance property owner rights with public nuisance concerns. Even so, blighted properties affect the health, safety, and welfare of the community. Abandoned and blighted properties contribute to an increase in police calls arising from theft, prowlers, drug issues, and squatting.

Additionally, blighted properties create the potential for increased fire calls due to accidental fires or arson incidents. Code enforcement issues also cause unnecessary hardship for neighbors including overgrown vegetation, dilapidated structures, wildlife, illegal dumping, and additional demand for sanitation services. Further, these properties frequently have unpaid property taxes and often result in a loss of property values of surrounding properties, thus affecting state and local revenues.

Economic Development. In partnership with El Dorado Inc., the City of El Dorado proactively markets itself as a prime destination for industrial companies seeking large volumes of water for their operations. The City has the ability to sell upwards of 10 million gallons of water per day (MGD) to industrial customers. Our unique location also allows us to meet a specific niche for economic development efforts as a preferred site for industries requiring large tracts of land (500+ acres) for development, Class I railroad service, and excellent transportation access.

To that end, the City supports any legislative efforts to simplify and streamline the economic development process at the Kansas Department of Commerce, and supports adequate funding to provide Kansas with appropriate representation in the site selection community. The City supports legislative programs designed to allow local governments to finance economic development initiatives and projects. The City supports collaborative efforts between state and local governments to finance public infrastructure needed to support significant economic development projects.

State of Kansas Workforce Study. The State of Kansas has not completed a statewide workforce assessment for several decades. The City advocates for funding to the Kansas Department of Commerce to conduct a statewide workforce study that assesses regional workforces. Many economic development prospects seek well-developed workforce data that is not readily available. The City advocates for a grant program to allow regions to complete a workforce study in the absence of the statewide effort.

Nutrient Trading Program. The City advocates for the opportunity to participate in a nutrient trading program with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE). Such a program would allow municipalities to trade credits generated by best practices with regulatory agencies or third parties to reduce necessary capital investments to comply with environmental regulations directed at water and wastewater treatment. The City supports any technical assistance the KDHE may provide to municipalities with respect to this issue.

El Dorado Honor Camp. The City supports efforts by Butler County to acquire and develop a multi-use event complex at the former El Dorado Honor Camp Facility. The facility, located near El Dorado Lake just outside the corporate limits of El Dorado, remains an abandoned and deteriorating structure that diminishes the usefulness of the property and creates a visual impediment to visitors of the lake and the Walnut River Sports Complex located directly adjacent from the property. The City supports legislative efforts to fund the razing of the facility to make the land available for redevelopment.

Community College Funding. El Dorado serves as the main campus for Butler Community College, which serves more than 13,000 students each year. The City encourages additional higher education funding, particularly for community colleges, and opposes any budget language that interferes with the post-secondary state aid cost model for technical and general education funding, including the distribution of new funding. The City also supports expanded funding for career, technical, and general education programs for higher education to provide local property tax relief.

Hospital Funding. The City supports legislative efforts to expand Medicaid coverage in Kansas. Susan B. Allen Memorial Hospital currently serves El Dorado's local healthcare needs and expanding coverage

would provide additional funds to flow into the local hospital to ensure its continued sustainability. Healthcare is an essential service needed to attract and retain quality employees to a community. The expansion of KanCare provides a healthcare option for individuals so they can remain with their employers in small communities and still receive quality healthcare.

Small community hospitals are struggling to stay afloat in today's lower reimbursement healthcare marketplace. KanCare provides an opportunity to convert self-pay patients, who very often are not able to pay their balances, into insured patients, which helps support our local hospitals. In addition, hospitals with a cycle of lowering reimbursement expenses must cut back on jobs to remain competitive. In many small communities, such as El Dorado, hospitals are often one of the primary providers of employment. An expansion of KanCare would allow these hospitals to provide quality employment opportunities that will, in turn, invigorate our communities and produce additional jobs.

El Dorado Correctional Facility. El Dorado Correctional Facility resides just outside the corporate limits of El Dorado and provides employment opportunities for many residents of our community. The facility also employs many people from the surrounding area to ensure safety and security at this important correctional facility.

The City supports efforts by the State of Kansas to ensure pay to employees of the El Dorado Correctional Facility remains competitive within the regional and industrial context. Higher pay means many vacant positions may be more attractive to prospective employees. It will also have the effect of increasing wages for many of our community's residents and improving their overall quality of life.