

# Washington County Chamber-Government Affairs Committee

## *Policy Statements for Brenham/Washington County, Texas*

*2016-2017*

The following are the Policy Statements of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce's Board of Directors as authored by the Government Affairs Committee. These Policies are deemed to be of utmost importance to the local business community and to the economic health of Washington County. The board encourages Chamber members to take an active role and be involved in government affairs. The Chamber exists to be the "voice of business" at the local, state and federal level, but members need to stay active by submitting input to the Chamber board and encouraging all employees to vote in elections.

*This list of statements is not placed in order of importance nor does it necessarily exclude others, which the Chamber Board may state at a later time.*

### **Job Growth & Business Recruitment**

Recognizing that a healthy economy will serve to encourage a positive economic impact and quality of life, the Washington County Chamber of Commerce believes in a fully-employed business community paying market wage rates.

We support legislation that encourages diverse businesses and industries to locate in Texas, such as (1) controlling excessive and burdensome taxes; (2) providing incentives for business recruitment, retention and expansion; and 3) workforce education funding and initiatives.

We encourage the local units of government to be aggressive in using incentives that have been provided through state and federal legislation. We support the Skills Development Fund and encourage usage by businesses, both existing and new to Washington County.

### **Transportation**

Recognizing that the economic well-being of the Washington County business community is highly dependent upon the ability to efficiently transport people and products to, from and within the region, the Chamber promotes programs that improve transportation opportunities and facilities, while preserving the rights of landowners and individuals.

We support a Highway 290 Improvement project to create continuous service roads along the entire Hwy. 290 corridor through the City of Brenham as part of the Evacuation Improvement Plan for Texas from natural disasters, such as hurricanes.

We encourage the development of capacity improvements, site corrections and intersection improvements to the highways within the county such that we efficiently connect all industrial and commercial areas to the highway system and to the businesses served by those roadways.

We encourage efforts to maintain and upgrade county roads and city streets to be safe, clean and efficient.

## **Health Care**

Recognizing that cost-effective health care provided to area businesses and families is an essential element of successful business growth and a healthy community, Washington County Chamber of Commerce supports an environment in which health care remains affordable to employers and where our local providers may thrive.

We support legislation that helps employers regain control of the health insurance benefits they offer to employees.

We support initiatives to encourage wellness and healthy lifestyles.

We support our local health care facilities in that locally managed and directed facilities provide the most high-quality, affordable services tailored to the community's needs.

## **Communications & Technology Infrastructure**

Recognizing that communication technology and the exchange of information is vital to economic development, now more than at any point in our history, the Washington County Chamber of Commerce believes that information technologies in the hands of area business, schools, government and families will serve to make our area globally competitive.

We support community and private-sector efforts to build and deliver state-of-the-art information technologies and infrastructure throughout the city and county.

## **Intergovernmental Agreements**

Recognizing the need for cooperation between units of government to promote economic growth and a positive quality of life for residents, the Washington County Chamber of Commerce believes that collaboration and improved relations between governmental and regulatory units in Washington County are essential to bring about positive change.

We support activities designed to foster collaborative action between all units of government and encourage those units to act in cooperation.

## **Public Education**

Recognizing that the ability of tomorrow's workforce to succeed depends on the educational foundation laid today, the Washington County Chamber supports programs, processes, activities and facilities that promote a strong local education system that, together with business and community leadership, prepares students for a productive role in the world.

We support efforts to ensure that students graduate with college and career readiness and relevant workforce skills, including a focus on educator quality and high quality Pre-K for all eligible children.

We support the delivery of an adequate and equitable public school finance system that prepares Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students for post-secondary readiness and supports Brenham and Burton public school districts.

### **Higher Education**

We support the availability of locally provided, post-secondary education and training for area residents and customized education services to businesses.

We support initiatives that would allow Texas community colleges to strengthen business partnerships, enhance workforce development, expand programs and services, recognize and preserve the current service areas for community colleges, and ensure that higher education remains affordable for Texas students.

We support the state funding goals for Texas community colleges as adopted by the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) and the Community College Association of Texas Trustees (CCAT), including additional funding to offset the rising expenses associated with Hazlewood exemptions.

### **Workforce**

Recognizing that Blinn College is committed to strengthening its business and industry partnerships and to enhancing workforce development in its service area, we support enhanced policies, programs and associated funding to strengthen the workforce development services and initiatives as adopted by the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) and the Community College Association of Texas Trustees (CCAT).

We support usage of the *Skills Development Fund* and *Skills for Small Business* to provide continuing professional education to our local workforce.

### **State Supported Living Centers**

Recognizing that the Brenham State Supported Living Center is a part of the local community and an important part of the local economy, the Washington County Chamber of Commerce supports all legislation that promotes choices for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, including the choice to receive services in a State Supported Living Center.

We support facilities that provide the appropriate level of care for specific needs. We oppose any legislation that seeks to close State Supported Living Centers or that limits a person or their family's choice to receive services in a State Supported Living Center.

We support the potential expansion of the Brenham State Supported Living Center to meet future needs.

We support and encourage legislation providing oversight and ensuring the wellbeing and safety of the residents of group home facilities along with inspections and supervisions that ensure health & safety standards are being met and maintained.

## **Housing**

Recognizing that job growth in the community will require housing for new and expanding families, the Washington County Chamber of Commerce supports efforts that will stimulate the development of an increased supply of affordable housing and multi-unit properties.

## **Crime/Law Enforcement**

Recognizing that to maintain a positive quality of life, the crime rate in a community must be kept as low as possible; the Washington County Chamber of Commerce supports the efforts of the police and sheriff departments.

We support efforts to enhance public awareness of substance abuse and gang activity and prevention campaigns.

We support the enforcement of punishment for repeat offenders, especially at the district court level.

We support the continued authority of local law enforcement agencies to retain property and currency gained through asset seizure and forfeiture from criminal convictions, and we oppose legislation that seeks to abolish their ability to retain these assets locally.

## **Tourism**

Recognizing that the tourism industry and leisure/recreation facilities are vital to a healthy economy and quality of life, the Washington County Chamber of Commerce supports efforts that promote tourism and tourism marketing.

As the home of the “Birthplace of Texas,” Washington County Chamber also supports efforts that provide for the preservation of historic sites and education of Texas history, including the Star of the Republic Museum.

## **Water**

Recognizing that water is a critical issue to the business community and all citizens in the state of Texas, the Washington County Chamber supports legislative leaders in their pursuit of a State Water Plan that respects private property while promoting economic growth.

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