

Dear Representative,

The City of Bel Aire values your service and continued support for legislative priorities that improve the quality of life for citizens in our community. We are committed to good governance through careful local stewardship and look to you, Governor Kelly, and the Kansas Legislature to support us in those efforts.

The Bel Aire Governing Body has identified the following priorities as very important to our community and state. We respectfully ask for your support in these specific areas during the 2025 legislative session. As members of the League of Kansas Municipalities, we also support their Statement of Municipal Policy for 2025, which is much more expansive. For 2025, Bel Aire has identified the following topics as highly important to our city and appreciates your support of legislation that addresses these priorities:

1. Revenue Neutral Rate (RNR).

This law is an unfunded mandate that does not accomplish the intended results of increased transparency. It should be eliminated. However, if the Legislature does not have the political will to eliminate this wasteful mandate, then at least consider HB 2001, which funds the mandate. Please also consider my email from early January to the KSDOGE concerning opportunities to improve this mandate.

2. Changes in lots after city-approved platting has been filed.

In the past year, Bel Aire (and other communities) has discovered that some developers have filed lot splits with the Register of Deeds that are in violation of Bel Aire zoning ordinances. When we spoke with the Register of Deeds office, we were told they have no requirement to investigate the legality or validity of such re-platting of lots. We believe State Law should require the Register of Deeds to validate with the affected municipality the legitimacy of such lot splits/replats that conflict with the municipality's approved platting (already on file with the Register of Deeds).

The only question the Register of Deeds needs to ask (and receive official written approval on) is whether the proposed re-platting complies with that municipality's platting and zoning ordinances. If the Register of Deeds receives an affirmative response from the proper municipal authority, they may file the proposed re-platting. If the municipality responds negatively, then the proposed lot split/replat is returned to the filer with a note indicating they must obtain municipal approval before the filing can proceed. This approval could be obtained by a developer prior to attempting to file the replat (with proof of municipal approval) or the Register of Deeds could hold the filing pending municipal approval.

3. Property Valuation.

We SUPPORT appraisals based on fair-market value as historically used in Kansas and OPPOSE caps on property valuations. We understand taxpayers' concerns about recent valuation increases due to the real estate market. However, state-imposed limitations on valuation methods shift the property tax burden benefiting one category of property to the detriment of others which is unconstitutional and inequitable. In Bel Aire, we have lowered our mill levy the last four years to offset some of those increases, but such decisions are best left at the local level. We OPPOSE any changes to or limitations on property value appraisals.

4. Medicaid Expansion.

We OPPOSE expansion of Medicaid.

5. Transportation.

We SUPPORT a modern and sustainable transportation system that meets the needs of all Kansans. We also support fully funding the IKE program and the needed improvements along the K-254 Corridor from Wichita to El Dorado.

Regarding K-254, we request that the Legislature fully fund the design and construction of the interchanges at Rock Road, Webb Road, and Greenwich, as included in the KDOT pipeline and the K-254 Management Plan. As you may know, KDOT has identified K-254 as one of the most dangerous roads of its type in the entire state. These improved interchanges will significantly address this safety concern.

6. Water.

Access to water is paramount for the growth and viability of communities. Governments at all levels should pursue the conservation, protection, and development of current and future water supplies to ensure access to clean, safe, and affordable water. We SUPPORT legislation that accomplishes these goals, as well as additional funding for such needs.

We specifically request that the Legislature direct KDHE to establish standards for treating sewer effluent to an acceptable level for potable water. Other states have such standards, and this can be a significant source of potable water. Literally millions of gallons of water are sent to rivers and streams every day that could be utilized as potable water if such standards existed.

Please review our priority list and give careful consideration to our input when bills are introduced that relate to any of these priority issues. We also ask that you thoroughly review all legislation and oppose any that erodes our constitutional home rule authority. Conversely, we ask that you support any legislation that strengthens local government home rule. We believe the best government is closest to the people and that local government should have the ability to govern in a way that best meets their needs. In 1961, Kansas voters approved a constitutional amendment giving local communities the ability to govern themselves through home rule. We all took an oath to support the Constitution of the State of Kansas, and therefore, it should be the goal of all elected officials at any level to support that amendment approved by the voters.

Our governing body is more than willing to meet with you to discuss how any potential legislation might affect our community or the state. Please feel free to email or call me at any time if you need additional information from us on any issue. My email is JBenage@belaireks.gov, and I can be reached at (316) 684-0226.

Thank you for taking the time to understand and champion these priorities on behalf of the City of Bel Aire. Our citizens truly appreciate your time and commitment as our Representative and for the work you do in Topeka.

Sincerely,

Jim Benage
Mayor