



## **League of Women Voters, Sussex County**

### **Report to County Council**

#### **Sunshine Day- March, 2014**

As part of the League of Women Voters' support for openness in government, its Observer Corps monitors governmental bodies for issues of importance to the League and to the county. The Observer Corps of the League of Women Voters of Sussex County was organized in January of 2009. We have now completed our fifth year of activity. Observers attend County Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, and Board of Adjustment meetings. Reports from the Observers are compiled into monthly reports and submitted to the Board of the League of Women Voters of Sussex County.

Between February, 2013 and January, 2014, League of Women Voters' Observers attended 75% of County Council meetings and 58% of the meetings of the Planning and Zoning Commission. This report is a compilation of the major reported issues and concerns from the past year as viewed by the Observers and that relate to positions of the League of Women Voters.

As stated, the issues reported here are those for which the League of Women Voters' has a policy position. Therefore, I will briefly refer to the relevant position or positions of either the League of Women Voters of the United States or the League of Women Voters of Delaware for each of the topics. In the interest of time, I may not recount the whole policy position.

#### **Highlights:**

##### **1. Water Problems.**

- We were pleased that Council did not oppose the septic system regulations that are projected to improve water quality standards in the Chesapeake watershed.
- Wells in the Herring Creek area are being monitored and show high levels of nitrates and chloride, possibly from salt water intrusion. Action is being taken to give residents the option of having the County organize a Water District in the area. This situation illustrates the potential for a much larger problem as development in environmentally sensitive areas continues along with sea level rise.

- The County's adoption of a new waste water territory map, giving the County the right of first refusal is a positive step toward eliminating a patchwork of private sewer projects.
- Storm water run-off and drainage problems continue. No definitive action by Council has been observed on this.

*LWVDE supports a comprehensive planning policy which includes necessary implementing ordinances and their enforcement. Strict control of development in flood plain areas.*

*LWVDE supports plans for extensive adaptation measures at all levels of government for climate change impacts that cannot be avoided, including sea level rise...*

*LWVDE- Support for preservation and/or protection of certain critical areas (ecologically fragile estuaries and coastal areas, farmland, aquifers, floodplain, and natural areas).*

*LWVUS- Environmental Protection and Pollution Control: Preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem, with maximum protection of public health and the environment.*

#### 4. Planning

- As has been reported in our previous reports to Council, a certified, professional, properly compensated land use planner, preferably more than one, is critically needed. This person should be providing expert guidance in decision making, not managing a department of employees. A certified County Planner would have access to information about previously approved projects and could provide coordination and a comprehensive counsel on potential traffic, water and other infrastructure concerns, thus assisting the Council in their important role in land use.
- Relation to economy- as we noted in our comments regarding the operating budget, the League of Women Voters of Sussex County is concerned that the heavy reliance on the transfer tax for County revenue and a failure to develop other sustainable sources of income is short-sighted.
- The costs of increased demands on infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, emergency services, schools, etc.) required by new developments should be anticipated before approval and paid for by the developer.
- Two years ago, the League of Women Voters Sussex County opposed granting time extensions to developers, in part because the County had no adequate system for quantifying the need. The problem was expected to be rectified by the introduction of computerization of Planning and Zoning Records. We would like to know that status of that project.

*LWVUS Supports comprehensive long-range planning and believes that wise decision-making requires adequate data and a framework within which alternatives may be weighed and intelligent decisions made; consideration of environmental, public-health, social and economic impacts of proposed plans and*

*actions; protection of private property rights commensurate with overall consideration of public health and environmental protection....*

*LWVDE- Support of the regulation of growth and optimum use of land through comprehensive planning policy. Monitoring of land use policies and their relationship to human needs, population trends, and transportation planning, and ecological and socioeconomic factors. Encouragement of continuing cooperation among governmental agencies.*

#### **5. Citizen's Right to Know/ Citizen Participation**

- It is very helpful that 911 addresses have been added to the site description in the agendas
- Information about obtaining hearing assistive devices is now available.
- The appointees and incumbents to Boards and Commissions are not required to reveal employment or other financial interests. This information should be made public.
- In The Rules of Procedure of the Sussex County Council, Rule 12 relates to the conduct of the Council during meetings. We have seen this rule broken numerous times with: failure to ask for recognition by the President of Council, side conversations, interrupting one another, talking over one another

*LWVUS- Protect the citizen's right to know and facilitate citizen participation in government decision making.*

*LWVDE- Certain governmental officials should disclose their financial interests and abide by guidelines for lessening the possibility of conflict of interest. Restrictions to eliminate conflict of interest should be mandated by law or local ordinance to include prohibitions against...regulating a business with which the official is associated or has a substantial financial interest. However, the law or ordinance should not be too restrictive thereby discouraging governmental services.*

#### **Additional Observations: Regarding issues where the LWV does not have specific positions.**

1. Although we continue to be favorably impressed by the fiscal management of the County, the practice of Council Members having individual accounts for granting monetary requests raises questions of appropriateness.
2. Council members have demonstrated genuine concern to citizens who have come to them for assistance.
3. County employees are consistently polite and helpful.

#### **In Conclusion:**

The League of Women Voters Observer Corps will be continuing its activities this year, as we share with you the goal of ensuring good government for the citizens of Sussex County. Thank you.

Carole Somers  
Coordinator of the Observer Corps  
League of Women Voters of Sussex County

DRAFT