



CIVIC LEAGUE
For New Castle County

Informed Citizens for Sound County Growth

P.O. Box 11523 - Wilmington, DE 19850

PLEASE ADVISE ADDRESS CORRECTIONS
WWW.CivicLeagueforNCC.Org

PERMIT STD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
NEWARK, DE
PERMIT NO. 208



JANUARY
2009

STATEMENT
OF
PRINCIPLE

Monitor and selectively evaluate government actions including laws, regulations and policy.

Provide appropriate forums for informing as well as soliciting input from the public.

Establish positions based on responsible studies and consistent with the aims and purpose of the organization.

Advocate these positions.

Founded in 1962, the Civic League is non-profit volunteer organization, which studies and illuminates County and State government actions concerning comprehensive developments and the quality of life and is a vocal advocate of relevant positions.

County Comments is the official publication of the Civic League for New Castle County.

Dan Bockover,
President

WWW.
CivicLeagueforNCC.ORG

PO Box 11523
Wilmington, DE 19850
302-529-1529

Content may be reproduced.

COUNTY COMMENTS

CIVIC LEAGUE FOR NEW CASTLE COUNTY
Informed Citizens for Sound County Growth

MEETING

Monday, January 26, 2009

(Note: Special Meeting Date)

7:00 PM at the Paul Sweeney Public Safety Building
3601 N. duPont Hwy
(Rte 13 South of DMV, North of Gracelawn Cemetery)

AGENDA

Transition Challenges
Commentary by Allen Loudell, WDEL
and Transition Team Representatives

Listening and Asking Campaign

New Castle County is launching a new Listening Campaign January 22 and we'd like to suggest it also be an Asking Campaign. It will be good to listen to the County's plans for the coming year along with their explanation of how we got into our current circumstance. And yes, they will no doubt ask for your questions concerning their crafted list of topics.

This is your opportunity however to bring up items specifically of concern to your community, to your Civic Association. Well in advance of the meeting scheduled for your council district you should put together a list of your own concerns. Be prepared to make good use of the opportunity to be heard and have your issues thoughtfully reviewed. Remember you'll have the opportunity to attend the meeting as a spectator or as a participant - asking questions on behalf of your community.

Do endeavor to bring up items that are of general concern to you and your neighbors. Items of personal or limited interest may well be better handled directly with your district councilperson. Each councilperson now has half as many constituents; the size of council was doubled just to make certain you have adequate representation.

On a reasonable basis, it will also be fair bring up matters of state and national interest. Your elected county officials have access to other elected leaders at every level and your opinions can be reflected in theirs as they participate on your behalf.

(continued)



Growth Projection Lowered for NCC

The Delaware Population Consortium, a State endorsed group, has released lowered population growth projections for New Castle County covering the 21 years to 2030. The former projection was for a growth of 66,000 persons, achieving a population of 600,000 by 2030. According to a newly released projection, the County with a population of 532,000 persons today is expected to grow only by 63,000 persons, reaching a scaled back 595,000 at the end of the next 21 years. A statistical analysis produces an estimate of an average of 1,400 houses per year will meet needs.

Also according to the Consortium, new home construction will be affected. If all currently filed plans for new housing were built, there would already be enough new units to meet the majority of the housing demand until 2030. This is sobering information but vital to guiding the activities of government, land planners and developers, along with those of our member civic associations.

WWW.CivicLeagueforNCC.Org

(continued from front page)

Likewise it will be appropriate to bring up general school questions. For instance, if there is still confusion because county and school tax invoices are mailed the same cost-saving envelope, is there any way to clearly differentiate that the biggest amount is almost always due to the schools, and the small one to the county? Would it be fair to print the school tax invoice on bright color paper?

This raises another potential question. School invoices are now reported on a line-item basis to the State. For your convenience the expenses are consolidated and presented in condensed format. It is technically possible for you to see the line items, but not easily. Would schools save money by skipping the consolidation work load while giving greater transparency to operations? Could the County provide line-item information, perhaps tied to purchase orders, and thus provide greater transparency?

Lean back in advance of your district Listening & Asking meeting and do a little preparation, along with a lot of thinking. This could include visiting the Civic League website www.CivicLeagueforNCC.org and being up to date with relevant information. Also take a fresh look at pages 30, 31 in your CL membership directory - perhaps even take it to your session - to help frame questions prompted by the presenters. This advance effort will assure you are getting the maximum benefit from the occasion.

Opinion

Has a Good WFH Idea Gone Bad?

The basic idea was to make enough affordable new housing available to meet the needs of mid-level wage earners - while encouraging construction concentrated in areas where infrastructure was already in place - or committed. This would include streets, sewers, schools, police & fire protection, plus other amenities such as "walkability" to mass transit, shopping and recreation.

Envisioned was a win-win situation for the developer able to build more houses per acre, government to provide services more cost-effectively, and home owners able to enjoy an enhanced level of living.

There would be upfront cost to government in the form of lower impact fees and a requirement for patience awaiting tax income as houses were sold.

Subsequent amendments to the originally proposed legislation allowed building even more units per acre while eliminating the amenities requirements. Predictable, developers rushed in to file plans for new houses, taking advantage of their current opportunity to enjoy greater profitability. Reportedly applications have been made to construct 4,547 new homes in higher density and without the requirement for amenities.

As the General Assembly opens, House Bills 29 and 30 have been introduced to address shortcomings in the county's Workforce Housing Ordinance. This is the time for citizens and civic associations to contact their councilpersons and ask that proper public hearings be held now, in advance of any further weakening of the workforce housing ordinance.

Chuck Mulholland,
President, Southern New Castle County Alliance

Opinion

Current Budget Musings

The Coons Administration and County Council keep telling taxpayers what a bargain county taxes are. One reason taxes appear to be low is that in the mid 80's the county created the requirement that new sub-divisions be required to establish Maintenance Corporations and cost shifted to them the cost and responsibility for parks and stormwater management structures (retention basins). Those costs often exceed what the residents pay in taxes but they don't get any credit for providing a local service function as do municipalities. That's double taxation. Mandating that Maintenance Corporations assume responsibility for complex systems with volunteers who are generally ill equipped to handle them is irresponsible.

In a campaign promise, County Executive Coons pledged no increase in taxes. Shortly after elections however, he funded a study that showed 75% of the budget was comprised of employee costs. These which in turn on average 13% above regional private pay scales. Additionally, benefits were about 40% of pay which was noted to be far more generous than the State employees receive. Prior to submitting his first budget, he prevailed on Council to repeal the 10% cap on tax increases which was created to inject fiscal discipline into the budget process. The result was a 17% increase in taxes. So much for his campaign promise of no increase in taxes. No wonder taxpayers are skeptical of future promises. He has made very little progress in negotiating union concessions and that they must face mandatory reductions in employee compensation and benefits which is being done in other parts of the country or risk bankruptcy as some other jurisdictions have had to face. While S& P and Moodys have given the county a top A+++ bond rating, they are the same rating agencies that gave toxic assets the same rating and a short time later re-rated those securities to junk. Fitch, the third rating company has put the County on watch due to the rapid draw down of the county surplus.

Now is a bad time for the County to attempt to implement their social engineering agenda of low cost housing for which the ordinance fiscal note predicts a \$300,000 cost. The program has been so well received by developers that the cost could easily double or triple. Incidentally, I attended the earlier budget informational meetings where suggestions were made regarding the private use of county vehicles and the abolition of the mounted police were suggested only to be met with disdain as not worthy of review but now make good PR fodder. Similarly, Land Use has spent \$49,000 on a flawed Smart Growth ordinance which addressed a solution seeking a problem.

It may be good to recall, in 2004 the legislature voted to repeal the process which would have added 6 new council members at a cost of \$1 million. Although the existing council passed a unanimous resolution saying the expansion was unnecessary, the heavy lifting in the legislature was left to myself and several others who recognized this would be an unfunded state mandate of little taxpayer benefit. The County Executive's union bargaining group allowed county holidays to be tied to state days which added \$500,000 to unexpected county costs. County bargainers should now require that the County's pay scales and benefit should merely mirror - and certainly not exceed - state pay and benefits.

Fritz Griesinger,
Community Advocate