



CIVIC LEAGUE For New Castle County

Informed Citizens for Sound County Growth

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**FEBRUARY
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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

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COUNTY COMMENTS

CIVIC LEAGUE FOR NEW CASTLE COUNTY
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MEETING

Tuesday, February 17, 2009

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

AGENDA

Governor Jack Markell

Reality

WHERE ARE WE

Check!

Governor Markell, after having been in office for one month, will speak to us about the state of the State.

Things to Think About

Here are some things to think about while our state legislators are on break for budget hearings.

Legislative Redistricting - How can gerrymandering be eliminated and will the promised reapportionment cures be enacted, with process open to the voting public.

State Government Transparency - State expenditures are already posted by object code for accounting purposes, so why not also post them on line for taxpayer viewing.

Forever Land Acquisition - When the State and County buy farm land, is it really to be held in perpetuity or only until some future event allows disposition.

Making Walking Possible - Does it seem disingenuous for elected officials to proclaim need for more walking, then employ no imagination in finding ways to make it possible.

Unemotional Solid Waste Disposal - How big is the problem and what are some of the good but less costly alternatives in successful use elsewhere.

School Transparency in Spending - School expenditures are already reported to the State by object code, so why not also post them on-line for comparison with other schools.

Consequences of Flat Population Growth - Which government projects need a second look with a projected virtually flat NCC population growth from 530,000 today to only 600,000 by 2030.

You are invited to comment on these things, add others, and bring them to the attention of your legislators.

Last Chance to Update

If you act quickly - by Feb. 17 - you can have your current listing in the Civic League 2008-09 Membership Directory updated. A Special Spring 2009 edition of the directory is being rushed into print. This edition will carry all current listings, including updates.

This special edition of the member directory of the Civic League for New Castle County is being rushed into print to support the newly undertaken staff work of County Executive Chris Coons, Governor Jack Markell, and Vice President Joe Biden. These elected leaders are reaching out to community leaders locally and across the nation in seeking feedback related to the current economic crisis.

The Civic League will be lending a hand by facilitating access to civic leaders throughout New Castle county. Copies of the expanded Spring Edition will be provided to staff members and other officials supporting the civic leader contact efforts of County Executive Coons, Governor Markell, and Vice President Biden.

The February 17 deadline was set because on that date Governor Markell will be addressing Civic League members at our regular monthly meeting. Immediately following the program, publication of the new directory will begin, with distribution soon thereafter.

To take advantage of this update opportunity, first check your listing in the current directory, then email your desired change to: DatabaseAdmin@CivicLeagueforNCC.org

ACT TODAY TO BE INCLUDED !

Cost of Council Doubles

When the idea for doubling the size of County Council was first proposed, the Civic League was in opposition for two reasons: First the County had but a modest population and second, the cost of Council would no doubt double.

County Council then had 6 members, each serving 88,000 constituents at a cost of \$1.5 million. Today Council has 12 members, each serving 44,000 constituents at a cost of \$3.3 million. Of course, then as now, Council also has a President - included in the cost - and continuing to singly represent all 530,000 constituents in the county.

Here are the operating costs, including salaries & benefits, according to the county's Office of Human Relations:

FY2002	\$1,467,203.77
FY2003	1,661,205.03
FY2004	1,807,750.64
FY2005	2,570,295.04
FY2006	3,183,262.74
FY2007	3,297,283.66
FY2008	3,274,768.66

Included in these costs is \$40,686 salary for each councilman, plus salaries ranging from \$40,686 to \$59,910 each for their 12 individual Aides, plus 43% benefits. Also included is the \$44,754 salary for Council President, plus salary and benefits for his Aide.

While seeking details about the current salary cost of the expanded county council, related questions were asked:

- Were salary increases accepted or rejected this fiscal year by members. (All accepted)
- Itemized medical and/or dental costs for each member. (Not Available)
- Which Council members are including family members on the publicly funded benefit plan of NCC. (Not Available)
- Which members have access to other coverage through other employment or retirement any other costs or benefits expended for council for FY2004 forward. (Not Available)
- The names of privately employed family members who are covered by County funded benefits. (Not Available)

Incidentally, assisting the 12 county councilmen and president are 13 state senators and 27 state representatives, supported by an undetermined number of legislative assistants. Their cost for salaries and benefits is also undetermined. It does show however that their combined total of 53, does provide one elected official per 10,000 of New Castle County's 530,000 constituents.

With all this representation and money expended, there are still instances of uncertainty where to turn for assistance.

CLARIFICATION

At the County's LISTENING CAMPAIGN meetings - when the question is asked, "Would you mind paying an extra \$10 or \$20?" - That is **per month! - not per year.**

ONE MORE TIME!

Every four years when we elect a new president, new governor and new county executive, we are invited to "listen" to presentations by the newly elected about new ideas, programs, cost cutting efforts, and other items of the day to try to convince us that our faith in the newly elected is warranted. This year because of the budget deficits at every level after years of growing government and questionable spending, we are once more presented with an opportunity to get the ear of our new officials. I read of the results of the County's Listening Campaign ----- decreasing revenues, no new sources of income, budget cutting still falls short, so how about an increase in property taxes to keep the services that citizens want? At the state level, the Governor and his folks will canvas the state to explain the fiscal mess inherited from the previous administration. We are treated daily to interesting disclosures as the old abandon the sinking ship leaving the "new" folks to plug the holes. We have been reading daily since November of the national fiscal crisis, of bailouts, and of stimulus packages to get America working again.

At the state level we should press for FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) at every level to look closely at what has occurred. We should have a voice as the Governor and General Assembly assemble their packages and solutions to get the state budget to balance. The Civic League for New Castle County and others have for some forty or more years studied, researched, and promoted many "good" government ideas and programs. This year more than any, given the lack of funding, the elected officials should enact serious solutions to the very dire existing budget shortfalls.

Our state population of approximately 870,000 is expected to grow only 20% by the year 2030. We already have 57 levels of government, 19(?) school districts with 35 presidents and board members, 62 state legislators, 93 officials at the city and county levels, plus state government employees, county and city staffs, for a STATE that is smaller than many counties in this country. We are no longer a rural state. We are part of the urbanized East Coast from Boston to Richmond with many of the same budget, development, environmental, and population issues that demand services and attention. We can't afford what we have much less add more layers of bureaucracy.

SO a bipartisan high-level committee should look at duplication of services among the many providers of school and government entities, statewide funding sources, Metropolitan government for the three counties, consolidation of school districts, a timed shrinking of the salaried "public officials", a statewide approach to the big ticket items - transportation, education, environment, social services, development, preservation of public, open, farm, and environmentally sensitive lands (we are after all part of a peninsula surrounded by water whose highest point is only 432 feet at Ebright Rd at the northern Boundary with PA). We NEED to make decisions within a SHORT time frame or our children and grandchildren will pay the Price! (NOTE: Many of these same items were addressed during the reorganization of New Castle County and the state under Governor Peterson- 1970.)

It is time again to take a HARD look at where we are and where we are going. The old way, whatever that is, is no longer acceptable.

Frances M. West
Government Editor