



CIVIC LEAGUE
For New Castle County

Informed Citizens for Sound County Growth

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MARCH
2009

COUNTY COMMENTS

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

**Special
Date**

MEETING

Wednesday, March 18, 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

Examining the New N.C.C. Budget

Billion Dollar 301 Bypass

Word at press time is that DeIDOT now estimates a cost of \$1.1 billion to build a spur route 301 highway from the Maryland state line over to connect with Delaware route 1, just south of the Roth toll bridge. It would be a multi-lane, limited-access toll road with a projected charge of \$7 for cars, \$11 for trucks, with a free smaller side road leading to the free Summit Bridge over the C & D Canal.

A resolution will be introduced at the Civic League's March 18 meeting calling for abandonment of the current DeIDOT plan and the design of a new, less costly road leading direct from the Maryland line to the Summit Bridge.

It should be noted that a new weigh station is nearing completion at the MD/DE line. Anticipation is that a substantial portion of the heavy trucks currently using 301 will then take alternate routes to avoid the potential grief of heavy load penalties. Reduced population projections for the area may further reduce the once anticipated increase in local traffic.

Lest there be concern about overcrowding the Summit Bridge, a call to the U.S. Corps of Engineers revealed that a companion budget price bridge of any width can be built over the canal if it is at least 138 feet above the water and stretches at least 600 feet between supporting pillars. Making it a monument is optional.

You are urged to attend the March 18 Civic League meeting and vote to save an enormous amount of taxpayers dollars.

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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Look for new Spring/Summer Civic League Directory

On the way to members is the new Spring/Summer Civic League Directory. It's ready for your use just as the warm weather brings an increase in civic activities and elected officials at all levels resume their deliberations in earnest.

This edition is not only updated with new and expanded member listings, but also contains additional contacts for government officials at the federal, state, and county levels. Extra copies have been printed for distribution to staff members of these officials who earlier expressed a desire to have more convenient access to area civic association leaders.

Attention is again called to the basic statistics included in the Directory to facilitate informed decisions as local civic issues are being deliberated. Particularly note that no significant growth is projected between now and 2030. Also of current interest is the abundance of elected officials, and the numerous school districts. See your Directory for details!

To meet the many requests, it is now possible to obtain additional copies at 2/\$5, including S & H. Bulk quantities quoted at special pricing. For prompt service, mail your check & request for copies to R. Romanelli, Civic League for NCC, 109 Coopers Drive, Newark, DE 19702.

A Helpful Chart of Accounts

Wouldn't it be great if you could find the cost anything in the county budget by just punching a few numbers into your computer and watch them jump up on your screen?

Right now the county publishes a thick budget book full of summaries of costs for individual departments. This is helpful if you want to compare current department costs versus those for previous years. If you want to know more about what costs go into those summaries, you have a challenge. It is not easy to find, let alone ferret out any detailed information.

In the old days all costs were entered into big journal books by accountants perched on tall stools, writing with quill pens. Imagine flipping thru pages looking for the cost of something, then having to copy it onto another piece of paper to take with you.

Fast forward to today when every purchase order is assigned an account number before it is issued. When the item is delivered along with an invoice, the amount is recorded in a computer, along with its previously assigned account number. Later, if you need to recall the cost, simply punch in the account number and it will instantly appear on the screen. It can even copy it off onto a piece of paper or forward it to someone else's computer. Forget that quill pen!

It is technically possible today to allow citizens to see the exact cost of everything in the budget - minus a few legally withheld items - if they have the key. The key is a Chart of Accounts used by county employees when issuing purchase orders, and recording invoices as they are paid. This Chart of Accounts, which is detailed and lengthy, could be made available, even in the form of a small booklet.

The budget will be much more meaningful when a Chart of Accounts is made available. Suggestions for budget reductions will be more relevant when based on the detailed information afforded. Enhanced confidence in competency of all government operations will assuredly be achieved. How can this be made to happen? Begin by asking for it.

So Much for Transparency

I thought about going horseback riding as something for our guests to do. A call to Carousel Stables led to surprise upon surprise. The County owns 60 horses, I was told, but none are available for riding - unless you sign up for an 8-week learning course. Some 150 riders of all ages are currently riding 52 of the horses, with 8 of the horses reserved for use by the county police.

Curious about the cost of acquiring and maintaining 60 horses, I looked at the current county budget. Surprise #1 was discovering the county has that many horses. Surprise #2 was the challenge of learning the costs of owning and caring for them.

Somewhere it must be written down what the horse operation costs and what revenue the riding lessons produce. Perhaps happily, a profit is even being made for the county - which a bit of transparency would conveniently reveal.

History Offers Alternatives for Nationalizing the Banks

Civic League Board Member and Former Chairman Victor Singer authored this OpEd article in the March 9 edition of the Wilmington News Journal. Vic Singer wrote:

"NATIONALIZE INSOLVENT BANKS NO, NO, NO! Trial balloons for nationalizing insolvent banks bombard us daily without exploration of alternatives or downsides"

Read Vic's entire article: WWW.CivicLeagueforNCC.org click on - "Members Comments"

Preliminary Listening Campaign Results

The County's Listening Campaign is now wrapping up. Here is an aggregation of typical questions and views expressed to date.

Process Questions and Improvements

With the weakness in Real Estate Transfer Tax income expected to continue, the \$3-5 million in savings is only a fraction of what's needed to avoid eating up cash reserves. We had a 5% tax increase in 2007 and a 17% increase in 2008; steps should be taken to address root causes, or the next proposed tax increase won't be the last.

At several Listening sessions it was mentioned that additional services, and therefore costs, are needed to support a growing population, however the Civic League data does not support those growth projections. The 2009 budget is 5% over the 2008 budget; it should be going down.

Within the County budget there are many "continue" and "maintain" budget items; it should be challenged with a "zero based budgeting" mentality to insure the need for services and functions. The Mission Statement should be reviewed and more focused so there is less room for interpretation by special needs.

Unusual County expense items should be segregated for public review, e.g. the Carousel Equestrian Center, Rockwood, and DelTech Golf facilities.

Suggestions for Further Cost Reduction

The costs of County Council have more than doubled since 2002

Does every member of Council need a dedicated (one-to-one) aide? We note that State legislators share aides; perhaps similar leveraging could be done in the County.

County employee benefits should be reviewed to be consistent with peer groups such as other counties and Delaware State employees.

Conveniences such as "petty cash funds" for Council members should be eliminated. At the very least all such expenditures should be documented for public review and scrutiny.

It has been mentioned that travel, training, and conference attendance has been reduced. Where can the public view what conferences Council is still attending?

The Dept of Administration has 23 positions (with no reductions). Why not out source some of this expensive legal help, as many corporations do.

Many corporations have also replaced pension programs with 401K's; is this likewise a cost savings opportunity for the County?

It is anticipated that a more compressive summary will be included in the April issue of the *County Comments*.