



CIVIC LEAGUE For New Castle County

Informed Citizens for Sound County Growth

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**NOVEMBER
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

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COUNTY COMMENTS

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

MEETING

Tuesday, November 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

Effective Community Engagement & Grassroots Advocacy
David Carter

Making A Difference

Since its incorporation in 1962, the Civic League for New Castle County has been a grass roots, nonprofit organization that has provided a strong voice to interested citizens in New Castle County. Over the years the League has provided ordinary citizens the opportunity to get involved, be heard - and make a difference.

The need for strong advocacy by citizens of the County has never been greater. One only need consider the repeal of the UDC (Unified Development Code) Section 3.319 Community Character Hearings, Workforce Housing, the current push for by-right development codes, and most recently Ordinances 09-066 and 067 that removed the public's right to see and comment on major parts of most subdivision plans at a point when anything could be changed.

In response to these problems, the League is strengthening its non-partisan efforts on behalf of its members and their communities. We must have this effort ready for the upcoming 2010 election season, when we have the best opportunity to have our voices heard and to hold elected officials accountable.

To help us start this process, we will begin with a presentation at our November meeting on some of the basic elements essential to effectiveness - organizing, influencing decision makers, media work, and message development - all from our members' perspective. Follow-up presentations and workshops are now being developed.

If you want to make a difference, discover how even when you feel out-funded, outnumbered, and even outgunned by special interests, your participation and support can make our voices heard and effective.

Dave Carter, Board Member

Dream of Faster Land Use Approvals

Obtaining faster approval for land use projects has been the dream for many property owners, builders and developers. It will probably have to remain just a dream.

You can now see for yourself the specific reasons for the lengthy, time consuming approval process - thanks to the move toward greater transparency in government. You can also determine at what point you may want to ask pertinent questions about any particular project of interest.

All proposed projects requiring County approval can now be viewed in complete detail on-line. Simply go to www.nccde.org and click on Quick Links, Parcel Search, Property Information and scroll down to Details. But wait! You will need to enter the property's street address or parcel number. If you don't have this information at hand, you can always go to the Big Yellow Sign (which must be posted on the site) and get locating details there.

Once you've found the listing on the Land Use web page, take time to review all the enlightening details posted there. As you scroll down, particularly note the many, and often surprising, levels of government and the array of government agencies* whose review and approval of the project is required. Also displayed are the numerous fees to be paid along the way.

Not only are the review agencies listed, but also the dates the project application was received, resubmitted for further review when changes were needed, and finally the date approval was given. Interestingly, in the approval column, you may find notations of only Conditional Approval - meaning even further consideration is in process.

Should your review prompt questions, you'll find the name of the plan reviewer is shown, to facilitate your contact at any point as the project is moving along.

After you have devoted the effort to reviewing one or two actual projects, it will be clear that the dream of faster project approvals is just that - wishful thinking colliding with the realities of life. You should be comforted however, knowing of the dedicated efforts of many to assure adherence to the law and the protection of our quality of life.

*Examples of approval process entities often involved: **Federal:-** FEMA, Corps of Engineers **State:-** DeIDOT, DNREC, Fire Marshall **County:-** Land Use, Special Services, Public Safety

GERRYMANDERING MUST BE STOPPED

The reason Delaware needs an Independent Redistricting Commission to change the way new legislative districts are drawn is that all legislative bodies engage in gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is a process of manipulating political boundaries during redistricting to affect a pre-determined political outcome. Your choice of candidates is usually controlled this way.

The three types of gerrymanders are as follows:

1 - Partisan - This occurs when one political party controls the entire redistricting process. The strategy behind the partisan gerrymander is to create enough extremely safe districts in order to insure that the current majority party always elects a majority of the political body for the next decade. The controlling party must work within Supreme Court and state law guidelines, but they calculate how to distribute their voters across the safe districts and those they are willing to risk. By placing just enough in each district to either comfortably win or have a good chance to hold the seat, they can often control the outcome of an election without the public's knowledge. Those who have mastered this process can tell exactly how the independent and third party voters will swing, so it is not necessary to have the majority of voters be of their party to succeed. Swing voters can surprise the party leaders, but this seldom occurs.

2 - Incumbent protection - The goal of this type is to secure reelection for incumbents when population shifts would logically move them into another district than the one they represent. This form of gerrymander represents a compromise between the two political parties--a situation which is possible only when one party does not have exclusive control of the redistricting process. Several members of the governing body from different parties whose districts join, are willing to make mutually beneficial trades of census tracts, but this is not just a matter of numbers. Legislators are loath to give up areas from which their best volunteers come or to give up some place for which they have provided funding for projects such as senior centers. Representatives (be they state, county, or local) gain electoral security through this kind of trading. Incumbent protection gerrymanders tend to produce the least competitive elections, and if they are aided by a last minute production of the new district maps, newcomers are shut out. When each party controls one chamber of the Legislature, which was the case in Delaware for decades, leaders negotiate these arrangements in secret to carve up the seats. This technique can also be used to punish incumbents who do not cooperate with their leaders. Representative Hazel Plant and Arthur Scott who sided with me in suing the General Assembly for failing to redistrict in 2001 according to law were purposely thrown into the same district, and Scott's best election districts were given to another incumbent. In 2011, redistricting could be under the control of one party. Many experienced incumbents are the best legislators, but unequal elections violate the State Constitution and strike at the very core of our American democracy

3 - Racial - The goal of racial gerrymandering is to secure the election of a candidate of a particular race. Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act now includes protection for "language minorities" such as Hispanics. Sometimes avoiding this is difficult to in large municipalities where groups tend to stick together. The need to break across the boundaries of Wilmington with lines extending into the suburbs and sometimes across areas separated by rivers and major highways has broken another rule that districts be as compact as possible.

The Civic League took a stand in 2002 to fight against unfair elections. The Census is next year. To stop this kind of nonsense, a bill must be passed this year to change the process.

If you want an increase in more fair and competitive districts, if you want to help invigorate campaigns and elections, if you want to boost the quality of our office holders and perhaps improve the state's governance, please join the Civic League, the League of Women Voters and Common Cause in supporting Senate Bill 20 which will mandate an Independent Redistricting Commission.

Frank Sims, Board Member

ANTICIPATING LONG COMING GOVERNANCE

In early March of this year, numerous issues with offered solutions were placed on the League's table for discussion toward enjoined resolution. For many on the local scene for over the past thirty-five years, issues reach beyond the County, the State and our Nation. Reduction and centralization of local government functions could not come more into focus in this down economic time. But just one tipping point is the knowledge that government is the largest employer in our State. Yet, massive efforts are engaged to turn the economy thru Government funding toward fast turn around building projects and encouragement to implode from the outside higher density residential growth. All this occurs, despite evidence of few new employment opportunities. By tradition, the majority of the tab for the new growth is picked up at the State level, aided by separate funnels of Federal outside help directly to the counties, towns and municipalities. The bi-partisan cry for reduced number of governments has been lost in the wind. Of the numerous suggestions offered for Statewide incorporation, below were a few suggestions directed toward our County:

- 1.) Require County, preferably, those immediate beneficiaries, to absorb costs of local roads, access to major interstate roads, maintenance of sewer/roads within developments, libraries, substantially schools, or the County forego Land Use and abrogate functions totally to a State non partisan, economic-land use body. The Federal Government should not be encouraging, for Delaware, more local governmental units through the disbursement of direct local Federal grants. All efforts must be concentrated on long term economic recovery, not to immediate entitlements, these latter costs later blessed on our Country and children.
- 2.) Incorporate County Police within preexistent State Troops. Consider reserve response teams, such as State National Guard, and trained, deputized citizenry for potential future civil disorders. Encourage small municipalities to continue contracts with State Police. Immediately, willow out non-emergency call ups and with substantial penalties for false alarms.
- 3.) Implement moratorium on new development general residential growth until renewed local economy.
- 4.) Incorporate County Library system under existent State Library System. When monies again available, program libraries to function as per title, not focused on entertainment or Community Meeting Centers.
- 5.) Distribute Paramedic response teams to more proximate locations, based on specific area actual incident call up.
- 6.) Parks: Revert local, substantially parochially used, parks to those immediate beneficiaries and, if non absorbed locally, reforest. Contract out all external and internal costs for equestrian and golf facilities with profit guarantee to County in maintenance of such select programs. Eliminate discretionary programs. Reintegrate into expanded school programs.
- 7.) Tax burden: Seniors who earlier derived benefits from public school system and infrastructure should NOT be excused from being equitably taxed. Sewer tax should continue to apply to those earlier benefitting, now requiring maintenance/upgrade of the system. Taxes should be based on user infrastructure consumption, not on value of land and buildings. Yet, when property is sold at profit, substantial tax should be applied, including transfer tax to assist in covering earlier public infrastructure costs.
- 8.) Permanent County furloughs must be implemented.
- 9.) Duplication between County and State is a first indicator that the service reverts to the State or is eliminated.
- 10.) Where a service is required, maximally outsource – this includes legal, private security, etc.
- 11.) Immediately terminate discretionary grants.

Comment: We are entering upon a time of renewed, and required, individual self reliance, drastically reduced purchasing and consumption, yet, in a continued realm of expanded Government cost, this latter untenable. We should be thinking less energy consumption, bunkering back population expansion, concentrating any substantiated residential growth near existent infrastructure, and finding methods of a dynamic new economy brought quickly through entrepreneurship and focused research.

Charlie Weymouth AIA, Board Member