



The Muni News

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The Municipal League 206-622-8333

INITIATIVES: WHAT ARE THEY REALLY UP TO?

By Mark Koenig

No one can disagree that initiatives are a powerful and popular tool for democracy. However, concern is growing regarding their use. Some citizens perceive recent initiatives as tools of special interest groups. Others believe they may circumvent or preempt legislative actions. Problems also arise when proposed initiatives lead to misunderstandings, legal challenges and unintended consequences.

After reviewing the findings of a study task force, the League recommends the following:

- **Convene a Statewide Citizen Initiative Review** – A panel of citizens modeled on the jury process

to study proposed initiatives and provide findings to the public.

- **Clearly delineate ethics rules** - Washington Attorney General to publish these, putting elected officials and their constituents on notice of what officials can and cannot discuss with regard to proposed initiatives.

- **Prepare fiscal impact statements** - Require the Office of Financial Management to outline the effects that proposed initiatives will have on state and local budgets, and have those statements published in the Voters Pamphlet.

- **Require 'revenue transparent' initiatives** – An accounting of new

See Initiatives. Page 4

UP FOR STUDY: THE FUTURE OF KING COUNTY **by Lucy Steers**

The Municipal League Board has adopted a new study titled "The Future of King County."

Phase I - Services in King County

The first stage of the study will address these questions:

- How long has King County been providing a particular service?
- Under what authority is it provided (is it mandated by state law or charter, or is it elective?)
- What does it cost to provide?
- Where did the funding come from?

Phase II – In-depth examination

More exhaustive questions include:

- Are mandated services being provided at levels beyond those required?
- Could certain services be provided by another entity, with new funding sources? Could or should they be

dropped?

The overall goal of the study is to suggest a set of criteria that public and county officials can use when making hard choices about future service provision. We will have significant opportunities for public input, and invite all League members to share their thoughts on this topic.

To assure strong citizen participation and representation of all perspectives, the League is seeking a media partner and outside funding for this project. The public needs and deserves balanced and reliable information on this vital issue.

If you are interested in serving on this committee, or want more information

See Up For Study. Page 5

The Muni News is published by the Municipal League Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that works in conjunction with the Municipal League of King County to provide the voters and citizens of King County with the resources they need to make informed decisions about civic issues.

The Municipal League is non-partisan and welcomes all points of view. If you have any questions or would like information on joining the Municipal League call 206-622-8333 or send an e-mail to muni@munileague.org.

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A Word from the Chair by Tom Albro, Board Chair

As you can see from this issue of The Muni News, your Municipal League is hard at work. In March we completed an excellent study on Seattle City Light. We have just published our study on the state wide initiative process. We are now launching a new study on the future of King County government. Of course, we have the Civic Awards coming up on June 21st and will be kicking off our annual candidate rating efforts in July.

Undoubtedly, you notice that the League is back in the business of studying civic issues. As a citizen organization, an issue study is one of the most powerful tools we have of influencing current debate and our community's future. The League has a long and notable history of providing leadership in this way. The examples are many, but I'll give you one: it was the

League that in the 1950's took on the issue of cleaning up Lake Washington. At that time, it was not safe to eat its fish or swim in its water. Many municipalities were dumping sewerage in the lake. The outcome of that study and the years of persistent work that followed was the formation of METRO, a regional authority that assumed the sewerage treatment responsibilities of all the municipalities in the area. It worked! Now our children swim in the lake again.

Sometimes the only way to successfully fix a nagging problem is to change the civic structures that have responsibility for it. Power and authority need to be properly aligned to deal with the problem. A well thought out study from the League can help pave the way for making change. That is why I am excited about our new study on the

future of King County governance. It's a beginning in the effort to look at how we have organized our local governments, what they are responsible for, and how effective those structures are in dealing with our nagging problems.

I am sure that you can think of many subjects that should be studied, water and transportation, for example, weigh on my mind. So here is where you come in. With just a few volunteers, we can only do a few things. With many volunteers, we can do many things. Become active in the League. Tell us your ideas and join a committee.

Our community needs you.

NEW TOOLS TO ENERGIZE THE POLITICAL PROCESS by Put Barber

We already know that the first step in solving a problem is identifying it. That's a lot easier to say than accomplish, when government is concerned.

The good news is that a tool is at hand to ferret out exactly where weaknesses lie in our system, whether they be among the electorate, media, or political leaders.

Developed by Richard Harwood, a Maryland-based columnist and political analyst, this "barometer" rates several aspects of each of those components and by doing so helps pinpoint areas needing attention, such as how well our political leaders work to keep the public informed; citizen expect-

ations of public servants; and the media's effectiveness at providing useful information and thoughtful analysis of issues.

The 35 King County citizens who participated in Harwood's daylong seminar gave relatively high marks to local political leaders but expressed dissatisfaction with the content of news media. They also commented on the citizenry's limited understanding of government and politics. The need to engage young people in the political process was also a recurring theme.

Municipal League President Tom Albro welcomed the group by commenting that a positive attitude is essential to any effort to improve political conduct. Coming to the

that there is nothing at all to talk about.

With support from The Pew Charitable Trust, Harwood is giving the same seminar in seven U.S. communities. To find more information about Richard Harwood and his work, visit his Web site: www.theharwoodgroup.com. The community conversations are at the link for the "New Patriotism" project.

The Municipal League is convening a follow-up meeting to see how we might continue to work on these issues with interested citizens and counterpart organizations. If you would like to join this exploration, please call 206-622-8333 or email muni@munileague.org.

Shedding Light on City Light by Jim Greenfield

In late March the Municipal League released Seattle City Light and "The Storm", the report of a year-long study of Seattle City Light. The study looked at the mission of City Light, which is to provide a reliable supply of electricity to homes and businesses in its service territory at fair and reasonable rates, and examined the utilities performance over the past several years.

The study raises serious questions about City Light's strategic planning process and how management responded to deregulation of the electricity market. In the past three years, rates for City Light customers have risen 58% and are likely to rise even more to pay off the utilities long-term debt, which rose dramatically from \$489 million in

1990 to \$1.57 billion in 2001.

Release of the report coincided with a Seattle Times series on City Light bringing public pressure for action. As a result, the Seattle City Council quickly took steps on the Municipal League's key recommendation, appropriating funding for an independent audit of City Light's.

The City will hire the auditor in May with a report due by the end of September. The League plans to actively monitor the audit process and will update our membership and the public on its progress.

You can read the full report, Seattle City Light and "The Storm" at www.munileague.org, or call 206-622-8333 to order a copy.

Interested in learning more about the workings of Seattle City Light?

Then attend "**Watts Up?**" a lunchtime forum sponsored by CityClub on May 16, 2002 from 12 noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Washington Athletic Club (1325 Sixth Avenue in downtown Seattle).

Panelists are Jim Greenfield, League board member and chair of the City Light study, Gary Zarker, Superintendent of Seattle City Light, and Seattle City Council member Heidi Wills, chair of the Energy and Environmental Policy Committee.

League members receive a discount off the admission price. Reserve a seat by calling CityClub at 206-682-7395.

A COUNCIL MEMBER RESPONDS

Excerpted from *Nicastro News* by Seattle City Councilmember Judy Nicastro

I was appalled after reading the Municipal League's report on Seattle City Light. Public utility financing is an area of major responsibility given to the City Council. Although "the market" has played a significant role in rate increases, I believe City Light has serious managerial problems that, until resolved, will further trouble City Light and may place an insurmountable debt burden (current debt is \$1.7 billion) on Seattle citizens.

The Council's failure to provide proper oversight for City Light has led to massive rate increases and less stability to meet our current energy needs - and this problem will extend for years. I have gone on the public record with a letter to my colleagues calling for a citizen's board of experts to give advice to the City Council on this complicated matter. I would recommend all citizens read the Municipal League's thoughtful report.

Be a Member/Find a Member

By Brian Thomas

Thank you for being a member of the Municipal League of King County. By this action you demonstrate that you truly care about responsive, honest, efficient, and effective government. Together we have done much, but there's yet much to do.

Help us grow the League by asking a friend to join. It's easy. Direct them to our web site www.munileague.org for reports on and discussions of the many interesting issues in King Country government. They can click "Join the League" and follow the simple instructions. If they are not on the Internet, call our Executive Director Tom Page (206-622-8333) for an information packet that includes an invitation to join our effort to make our government better.

Thank you again for your dedication.

Gearing Up for Candidate Evaluations by Lonnie Lusardo

As the 2002 candidate evaluations loom, we are working hard to refine the process and training volunteers to research and interview candidates as we prepare for the responsibility of evaluating contenders for the State House and Senate along with candidates for judicial offices in King County. These enormous tasks are shared by six committees.

The **Candidate Evaluation Steering Committee** meets year round to review the evaluation process. It oversees the work of the four subcommittees that will conduct candidate interviews and another two committees focusing on process improvements.

Candidate Evaluation Committees:

- **Judicial Evaluation Subcommittee** – Chair Mark Koenig. Evaluating candidates for judgeships in King County.
- **Central Evaluation Subcommittee** – - Chair Keven Franklin. Evaluating candidates for legislative districts in central Seattle.
- **South Evaluation Subcommittee** – - Chair Jennifer Piccolo. Evaluating candidates for legislative districts from South King County.
- **North/East Committee** – Chair Tami Landburg. Evaluating candidates for North

Seattle and Eastside legislative districts.

Candidate Questionnaire Subcommittee – Responding to candidates concerns about the length and detail of our questionnaire, this committee is streamlining the form candidates submit as part of the evaluation process.

Candidate Investigator Subcommittee – This subcommittee is completely revising the materials used to train the volunteers who prepare reports on candidates from media articles, personal references, Public Disclosure Commission reports, and other sources prior to the candidate interviews. This training helps the volunteers better rate the candidates on their knowledge, effectiveness, character, and involvement. A revised **Candidate Investigator Handbook** guides researchers through the process.

The process of preparing for candidate evaluations has been refined considerably from years past, thanks to the very hard work from many people, including, and especially, the volunteers. As July nears, we anticipate an exciting and successful candidate evaluation process.

Interested in volunteering to serve on a Candidate Evaluation Committee? Call 206-622-8333 for an application.

“POOR” OR “NOT QUALIFIED”? by Lonnie Lusardo

If you were a candidate running for office, which rating would seem worse to you: Poor or Not Qualified? The decision may seem academic since either rating is a bleak statement about your readiness to hold public office. For the volunteers doing candidate ratings in the past few years, however, this distinction has caused no end of confusion. Based on a recommendation from the Candidate Evaluation Steering Committee, the board of trustees adopted a solution at their April 2002 meeting: eliminate Poor and retain Not Qualified as the lowest ranking.

The new rating system now in place is Outstanding, Very Good, Good, Adequate, and Not Qualified. This system will be used for the 2002 ratings and we invite your response to the decision.

For more information about the Municipal League candidate evaluation process, refer to the Web site www.munileague.org and click “Candidate Evaluation.” You will see two other references to “Q & A About Candidate Evaluations and Ratings” and “What is the Candidate Evaluation Process?”

INITIATIVES: from Page 1

appropriations and/or budgetary losses.

- **Require ‘revenue transparent’ initiatives** – Show accounting of new appropriations and/or budgetary losses.
- **Consider abolishing direct initiatives** (initiatives to the

people) – amend the State Constitution to permit only indirect initiatives (initiatives to the legislature).

The Municipal League will publish the full initiative report shortly. Look for it on the League website in mid-May or call office at 206-622-8333 to request a copy.

Note from the Board: A special thank you to Initiative Committee volunteers, including Karianna Heimerman, Susan Hoffman, Lee Marchisio, Margaret Opalka, Noah Purcell, Jasmin Weaver, and especially committee chair Mark Koenig.

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS by Lonnie Lusardo

The Municipal League is searching for intelligent, perceptive, critical thinkers. Does this sound like you or someone you know? Then the Municipal League *needs* you and your friends.

The four candidate Evaluation Subcommittees are seeking volunteers to evaluate candidates on this fall's ballot (see "Gearing Up For Candidate Evaluations").

Here's what you would do:

- Research candidates' backgrounds.
- Interview candidates.
- Gauge their effectiveness community involvement, character and knowledge of issues.
- Rate candidates.

Here's what you would gain:

- Learn more about legislative and judicial candidates.
- Work with some of the most interesting and well-informed individuals.
- Contribute to your community and government.

Here's how it works:

- Attend two 3-hour training sessions—one on issues likely to face candidates this year and another on the rating process.
- Attend at least half the interviews conducted by any one committee.
- Attend two additional meetings to finalize ratings.
- Meet with your committee up to four nights a week for three weeks. Interviews may run

from 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. each night, but usually last from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Volunteer recruitment begins in June. Training sessions will be on the evenings of July 22 and 23. Local experts will cover issues such as transportation, water resources, protected species, environmental concerns, education, and budgeting. The trainings sessions are also open to candidates and League members.

Remember, good government only happens with active citizens. Why not contribute your time, intelligence, and knowledge to the task? That way, government may just get done the way you want it to.

Tom Page, the League's executive director, has details. E-mail him at muni@munileague.org, or call 206-622-8333 for an application.

Up For Study

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about it, please contact the Municipal League office at muni@munileague.org, or 206-622-8333.

Studies just off the press

Look for details in this *Muni News* about the two recently completed League studies on Seattle City Light and the Initiative & Referendum process. The reports include the follow-up action taken based on the studies' findings. Information is also available on the Web. Kudos to the volunteers on all the committees for producing thorough and well-written products.

Taking The Pulse

Yet another League study, Taking

The Pulse, surveyed over 750 King County residents on their thoughts and concerns about government and the significant issues in our region. Look on our Web site for links to the completed study in the next few weeks. Thanks to all the citizens who took the time to respond to the survey.

Committee background

The Issues Management Committee is writing a study guide to help volunteers research and write about topics of interest to King County citizens. It is based on a guide written by the League of Women Voters of Seattle. Volunteers are our most valuable resource, and they need and deserve all the help we can give.

You can be part of it

If you are an issues junkie, we can use you on the Issues Management

Committee. Our mission is to support all League efforts relating to public policy and government oversight. These activities include studies, advocacy, analysis of ballot measures, and other issue-related written materials from the League.

For almost 100 years King County citizens have depended on the Municipal League for balanced, thorough, and reliable information on issues. This committee plays a key role in that effort.

We meet at noon on the third Friday of each month in the Preston law firm, 50th floor, Bank of America tower (formerly Columbia Tower).

All Municipal League members are welcome. E-mail Lucy Steers, Issues Management Chair at lbsteers@aol.com for details.

The Municipal League

810 Third Avenue,
Suite 224
Seattle, Washington
98104-1514

PHONE:
206-622-8333

FAX:
425-671-0506

E-MAIL:
muni@munileague.org

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.munileague.org

CIVIC AWARDS SET FOR JUNE 21ST AT WESTIN HOTEL IN SEATTLE

Save Friday, June 21, for the League's annual Civic Awards luncheon at the Westin Hotel in downtown Seattle. Tickets for Muni League members are \$60, \$70 for the general public.

Nominations Committee Chair Deryl Brown-Archie says this year's slate of candidates for awards is very strong. The League recognizes as many as eight categories of civic leadership. Brown-Archie's committee will prepare a slate of finalists for selection by the Municipal League Board of Trustees at the May 20 board meeting.

The featured speaker is Alan Mulally, president and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes. Mulally has worked at

Boeing since 1969 and is responsible for all of the company's commercial airplane programs and aviation services. His division had sales of more than \$30 billion in 2000. Mulally became president of Commercial Airplanes in September 1998; the responsibility of chief executive officer for the business unit was added in March 2001. He was named president of Boeing Information, Space & Defense Systems and a senior vice president of The Boeing Company in February 1997.

Look for your invitation in the mail soon. In the meantime, visit the our Web site at www.munileague.org for reservations and to see the names of past award winners.

Special Offer available through June 5th: Reserve a table for ten at the early bird rate of only \$500. Call 206-622-8333 for details.

Municipal League of King County

810 Third Avenue, Suite 224
Seattle, WA 98104-1614

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