



The Muni News

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Muni League to Voters: NO on Districts, YES to Levy

Rita Brogan


The Municipal League's Board of Trustees recently announced its positions on two Seattle general election ballot issues:

*The League recommends **AGAINST** a proposal to amend the City charter to create nine electoral districts based on population and to require election of City Council members from districts, rather than at-large.*

*The League recommends **FOR** a proposal to authorize a 9-year property tax levy to generate \$167 million dollars to upgrade Seattle's fire facilities and emergency response capabilities.*

In reviewing the proposal to create nine electoral districts in Seattle, the League considered the argument that district elections would make the City Council more accountable and accessible to voters, but ultimately concluded that election of the City Council by district would result in elected officials focusing on narrower, more parochial issues at the expense of more important citywide or regional issues. While they acknowledge there are problems with accountability and responsiveness of the City Council, these are not problems that district elections would solve. The League is concerned that greater governance problems might be introduced with districting, such as fragmentation, parochialism, neighborhoods pitted against each other for resources, inability to site unpopular facilities, and solidified incumbency.

In reviewing the proposal to authorize a 9-year property tax levy to upgrade Seattle's fire and emergency response capabilities, the League noted that many of these facilities are aging and wholly inadequate to address modern threats. Seattle's Emergency Operations Center is outdated and vulnerable to a variety of failures and might not stand up to a large-scale emergency, whether it is an earthquake or a terrorist attack.

For the full text of the recommendation of the Ballot Issues Committee of the Municipal League, please visit www.munileague.org. 

CEC Volunteers Celebrate Their Success



On Primary Night, September 16, the generous volunteers who donated their time and effort to the Municipal League's candidate evaluations gathered at Trustee Norma Jean Hanson's house to celebrate their successful work. At the far left, a friend of the Muni



League enjoys the potluck dinner provided by the group. Immediately left, Trustee Jennifer Piccolo and Shirley Gaunt-Smith discuss election results.

Visit the Municipal League's website for candidate ratings, initiative evaluations, and more!
www.munileague.org

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Reflections from the Chair of the Municipal League

Putnam Barber



The summer and fall are always the busiest season for the Municipal League. This is the time we focus on candidate evaluations and ballot issue recommendations.

Thanks to the fine work of dedicated volunteers, the Muni League continues its support for empowered citizens and informed choices. In this issue you will read

that we are urging Seattle voters to support the proposed levy for improvements in fire and disaster protections. We also explain our opposition to this year's version of the idea that members of the City Council should be elected from districts. I encourage you to visit the League's website at www.munileague.org to read more about these issues and see our candidate ratings.

We are often asked why the League doesn't rate every candidate in every race in King County. Sadly, the answer is we just don't have the volunteer capacity to convene that many groups to investigate, interview, and recommended ratings for the board to consider. If you or someone you know would be interested in being part of this important project next year, please let us know — call the office and leave a message or send an e-mail to muni@munileague.org. You'll provide a valuable service, have a good time and see political candidates in a totally different light.

Though the rush of political activity is over, the pressure to keep the League alive and well continues. We need all our current members to renew for next year. Even better, please recruit more people who want to support an active effort to improve local government and public policy for every community in King County. When your renewal letter arrives, please respond quickly. And if you can add a couple of gift memberships for people you know will welcome the connection, that would be greatly appreciated.

Starting soon, the Municipal League will be hosting a regular show on King County's Community Television Channel. Trustee Rita Brogan will interview political leaders and knowledgeable observers. Shows will focus on the issues that affect people and communities in King County. We think the show extends our ability to inform and empower citizens. Look for it in the next couple of months and let us know what you think.

All of us on the board of Trustees thank you for your support, and for your interest in the work of your Municipal League. 🙏

“Though the rush of political activity is over, the pressure to keep the League alive and well continues.”

Municipal League Memberships Offers Numerous Rewards

Norma Jean Hanson

A special thank you to all the members who have supported the Municipal League through 2003 with their yearly renewals and additional gifts. The phrase “we couldn't do it without you” has a special significance for us, especially during these difficult economic times. Your loyalty is most appreciated.

The annual fall membership drive is in full swing. The Board of Trustees recently contacted long-time members about their renewals and asked about your preferences for how the League should contact you.

In this new technology age, we find that electronic mail is the most efficient, cost-effective method to maintain contact with our members. If you can provide us with your e-mail address, we can promptly share important messages and current news about local governance with you. If you are not already registered, please go to our website, www.munileague.org and do so.

Have you considered gifting a special friend, a co-worker, or relative with a League membership? As a special thank-you to current members, any new memberships for friends or family will be rewarded by a gift from the League to both the new member and the referring member. For more information about this special offer, please call the League office at (206) 682-6333 to leave a message. Someone from the membership committee will return your call with more information. 🙏

Out of Control: KC Revenue and Spending Gaps Aren't "Business As Usual"

Rita Brogan

The Municipal League will soon be releasing a study on issues related to the future role of King County government. Over the past year, the committee of volunteers involved with the study has met with numerous experts on King County governance and finance. We also reviewed past attempts at governmental reform over the last 20 years. We met with current and former King County elected officials who have graciously spent time with us discussing the extraordinary challenges facing our changing and growing county.

We've developed a very deep appreciation for the difficulties involved in managing the King County budget. King County has been required to make deeper and deeper cuts into the General or "CX" fund, which only comprises 16% of King County's overall budget. Based on our research, the continuing General Fund deficits facing King County result from a combination of systemic issues related to revenue, expenses and the governance structure of King County.



A combination of the limits on property tax growth, combined with the fact that the highest value tax base in King County is now almost entirely inside city boundaries, has left King County with inadequate revenues to fund public services and infrastructure. At the same time, over 70% of the general fund is used for law and justice functions that are required by state and federal mandates, most of which (61%) is controlled by separate elected officials (court, prosecutor, sheriff). General fund expenditures have grown at 5.5% to 6.5% per year, driven in large part by increased labor costs.

Our committee has observed that King County's fiscal crisis is related to its governance structure, as both the regional arm of the state and a local government to unincorporated King County. We believe that there is no way to escape the dilemma currently faced by our General Fund without some significant changes in governance and revenue collection.

Our recommendations focus on those needed changes. The Committee has developed a draft report that is being reviewed by a separately-appointed reading committee. The committee will then refine its recommendations before they are presented to the Board of Directors for consideration and action. 🔥

Herb Robinson: 1924-2003



Farewell to former League Trustee Herb Robinson, whose knowledge, good humor and excellent judgment advanced the cause of informed citizenship. Herb passed away on October 15.

A 40-year veteran journalist, Herb served as a columnist and editorial page editor at the Seattle Times and was news director at KOMO Television. He was a founding member of the Washington News Council and the recipient of numerous awards for journalistic excellence, including the Municipal League's 1983 Civic Award for Outstanding News Reporting. Herb had turned to writing fiction in recent years and described his latest novel, *Kennewick Man*, as a "dark comedy spoofing talk-radio."

To help honor Herb's legacy, the Washington News Council has established the Herb Robinson Scholarship to be awarded in spring 2004 to students who are planning careers in communications. Remembrances may be made to the Washington News Council Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 3672, Seattle, Washington 98124-3672.

Herb kept humor and respect close to his intellect, and shared them through a variety of League activities. He served on the board until 1998 (in tweed, a turtleneck, and a ski goggle tan) and in a variety of roles, most recently with the 2002 Civic Awards committee and Ballot Issues committee.

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Vote for the 2004 Board of Trustees

It's the time of year when everyone, even the Municipal League, gets into the voting mood. In early November, members will be asked to vote on new Trustees for 2004. The Board consists of up to 40 Trustees, with at least seven new Trustees being elected by the membership each year. Trustees, who serve three-year terms (renewable once), attend monthly board meetings, participate on board committees, attend Municipal League events, and assist the organization through other volunteer and fundraising activities.

At press time, the list of candidates for 2004 has not been finalized. Various Trustees are busy contacting individuals to finalize a strong list of candidates for your consideration. Ballots will be out shortly, so look for yours in the mail. The final count will be in before the November 17th Board meeting. 

About our organization...

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 King County voters and citizens with the resources they need to make informed decisions about civic issues.

The Municipal League is nonpartisan and welcomes all points of view. If you have any question 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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