



# The Muni News

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## Shortchanged: Municipal League Releases Report

Rita Brogan

You can now  
renew your  
membership on  
the Municipal  
League website!  
[www.munileague.org](http://www.munileague.org)

In late November, the Municipal League released its report on King County's fiscal crisis. The study concluded that major changes in the County's responsibilities and focus must occur to address critical regional issues. The report notes that despite deep budget cuts in recent years, there are insufficient revenues available to fund King County's General Fund. For example, over \$50 million in cuts to the General Fund budget (approximately 10% of that budget) have been required to balance the 2003 County budget. Additional cuts of \$20-\$25 million are anticipated for each of the next three years.

"King County is squeezed by the 1% limitation on property tax growth, the increasing rate of annexations and incorporations, increased justice system and labor costs, and state and federal mandates," noted David Tarshes, who co-chaired the study committee.

In addition to providing countywide services, King County also provides local services to unincorporated King County. In 2003, about \$42 million of the money spent to provide local government services was supplied by revenues generated by the County in its countywide government role.

In approving the report, the Municipal League Board of Trustees recommended that:

- King County should divest itself of its role as a local service provider in order to fulfill its role as provider of county services.

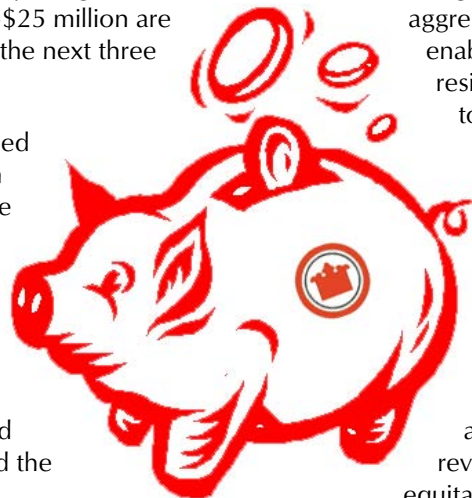
- All land within the urban growth boundary should be incorporated or annexed to the city or cities within each area's sphere of influence through collaboration between King County, existing cities and citizens. Rural unincorporated communities should be organized into townships or other entities for the purpose of local service delivery, to include local land use decision-making consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies and the Growth Management Act. King County should be more aggressive in encouraging and enabling unincorporated residents to find alternatives to King County for local service provision.

- King County and the other members of the Washington State Association of Counties should continue to seek, and the Legislature should authorize, additional revenue sources to equitably fund county services.

- As additional revenue opportunities are explored, the County must also continue to cut costs.

The report was sponsored by the League's King County Study Committee, co-chaired by attorney David Tarshes of Davis Wright Tremaine and Rita Brogan, CEO of PRR, Inc., who worked with a group of citizens over the last year to develop the study's findings and recommendations. 

A full copy of the Municipal League's new report, **Shortchanged: King County's Fiscal Crisis**, can be found on the League's website at [www.munileague.org](http://www.munileague.org).



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## Reflections from the Chair of the Municipal League

*Putnam Barber*



Earlier this year I made a communications mistake I don't want to repeat.

Near the end of a letter to Municipal League members, I added one more request to a list that was already too long. The goal was to seek your help in building our organization. I hoped to add to the ranks of Municipal League supporters. We need more people who share our commitment to active citizenship to join.

I know I made a communications mistake because a lot of the envelopes came back with early renewals from current members. Welcome indeed! Thank you to everyone who signaled continued support in such a tangible way.

But, we still need more people who share our commitment to active citizenship to join the Municipal League—and the annual membership drive is upon us.

Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone* and other interesting studies of American community life, has documented a great falling away from civic engagement throughout our country. The Municipal League certainly has felt those trends over the years.


At the same time, there are thousands of people in King County who want to make our governments more effective, our elected officials more responsive, and our policy choices more clear. In other words, hundreds of people who share our goals but are not

yet members of the Municipal League.

I think the best way to reach those people is through your help. During the Municipal League's 2004 membership campaign, please take a minute to talk to a neighbor, a co-worker, or an acquaintance from a community project or a campaign and ask them to support the Municipal League. Every person who says 'yes' represents a vote of confidence that active citizenship continues to bring strength and value to our communities.

Everything about joining the League is on our website. Or ask them to call 206-622-8333 (ext. 4) and leave a message. We'll take it from there.

The Municipal League enjoyed a great year. With support from hundreds of members and volunteers, the League made real contributions to better government throughout the county. During our membership drive, we decided to publish some of these experiences. So be sure to read the articles from CEC volunteers and share this newsletter with others committed to active citizenship.

Thanks for helping others learn about the League. 

**"Robert Putnam... has documented a great falling away from civic engagement throughout our country. The Municipal League certainly has felt those trends over the years."**


## Making King County Elections Work

*Kate Tate*

The notorious "hanging chads" of the 2000 presidential election never challenged King County elections officials. But other persistent elections problems occurred in successive elections, causing the King County Executive to hire a new Director of Elections. The King County Council also convened a 13-member Citizen Election Oversight Committee to restore voter confidence in county elections.

By the end of March 2004, the committee intends to recommend practices that will improve performance accountability of the elections process, in time for the fall 2004 elections.

A.J. Culver, former Issaquah mayor, Municipal League Boardmember, and president of the King County Suburban Cities Association, represents the Municipal League and is Chair of the oversight committee. "Great care and immense effort is expended to ensure every vote counts," he said. "Part of the committee's work requires a close look at the changing trends in voting. We are even considering if it is feasible to initiate 100 percent voting by mail." Culver noted that in the recent General Election, over 70 percent of the votes cast were by absentee ballot.

The committee will also examine technology challenges such as security, process improvement, and structural issues like precinct size and number of polling places. 

## Protects Against Skin Cancer! Two CEC Volunteers Share Their Experience

*Annette de Soto and Katie Bethell*

Why do I volunteer on the League's Candidate Evaluation Committee (CEC)? The short answer is that a former Muni League Boardmember recommended it.

The longer answer is that the CEC is one of my most rewarding (and challenging) volunteer experiences. Many organizations I have volunteered with just need a warm body – they haven't used my skills or interests and don't care whether I show up. The Muni League really needs YOU: They recruit, screen and interview volunteers, creating a diverse group of people with different opinions, backgrounds and perspectives to shape candidate ratings.

### *Some of the rewards:*

1. Your opinion matters and your voice is heard.
2. You make an important contribution to civic life by helping voters assess candidates' qualifications for office.

3. You meet people you might not otherwise meet and come to appreciate the breadth and diversity of political opinion and life experience.

4. You avoid skin cancer (*see Challenge # 2 below*).

5. The other volunteer committee members are intelligent and offer thought-provoking opinions.

### *Some of the challenges:*

1. The other volunteers are intelligent and offer thought-provoking opinions, which can stretch you out of your comfort zone.

2. You volunteer many of your August evenings, when your friends and family are outside enjoying the sun and warm weather.

3. You must be fair and unbiased in all of your candidate ratings and discussions, challenging your personal political beliefs.

My friends can't believe that I happily give up Monday through Thursday evenings (5–9 p.m.) in August to interview candidates. I admit that some days are happier than others. When the Mariners are in town and the evening temperature is a balmy 75 degrees, I'll be honest: It's a challenge.

But, it is more than worth it.

I hope you consider volunteering for a committee next year or telling someone you know about the rewards. We need a greater diversity of voices at the table – ethnic and cultural diversity, age, life experience, political beliefs – and the list goes on.

Please help continue to bring the most unbiased candidate ratings to King County voters. 🙏

The Muni League has a good thing going with its Candidate Evaluation Committees. Where most endorsements and evaluations are based on partisan, political considerations, the Muni League's focus on qualifications and performance is refreshing and approachable to this young citizen. The training, research, discussions, and final evaluation together formed a rich educational and community-oriented experience that I will recommend to my friends and colleagues.

Before I joined the CEC, I was frustrated with the difficulty in navigating Seattle candidates and political issues. I joined because it seemed that by participating I would benefit from the diverse candidate research. The experience of volunteering for the CEC turned out to have benefits far beyond my initial expectations.

Not only did I participate in extensive research, I had the pleasure of meeting civically engaged and active citizens. They represented a diverse array of interests within Seattle. I found it invigorating and educational to be immersed in an environment that fostered such lively discussion and debate.

Now, with the training and positive experience provided by the CEC, I am continuing to work in local politics and develop my own civic projects. The Muni League provides a valuable service to me and our community. 🙏

*Katie Bethell is an undergraduate at the University of Washington and is actively working to register young voters and to provide civic education to the Seattle community through the Coalition of Informed Student Voters (CISV). She can be reached at [katbet@u.washington.edu](mailto:katbet@u.washington.edu).*



*Annette de Soto served as vice-chair of the Central CEC committee. She is Executive Director of the nonprofit agency Friends of the Children, the only*

*program in the nation connecting vulnerable young children with paid, professional mentors from kindergarten through high school.*

**Cast your vote  
for the 2004  
Municipal League  
Board of Trustees.  
A ballot is inserted  
into this issue of  
Muni News!**

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**CALLING ALL  
CHANNEL SURFERS!**

**In January, the Muni League will  
begin hosting a monthly public  
affairs program on the King County  
Government Access Channel.  
Stay tuned to our website as  
details unfold.**

## **Renewing Muni League Membership is Easier, More Rewarding**

***Norma Jean Hanson***

You can now renew your Municipal League membership online! Visit [www.munileague.org](http://www.munileague.org), click on "Donate Online," and select the "click & pledge" option. It's an easy way to renew your commitment to good government!

When you receive your membership renewal notice for the coming year, please respond promptly. As a special thank-you to renewing members, you will receive a "lenticular/holographic" bookmark with a patriotic theme. Look for yours in the mail after you renew your membership.

Are you making year-end donations to nonprofit agencies? Please consider donating to the Municipal League. A gift in any amount to the Municipal League Foundation is tax-deductible and helps ensure that our programs continue.

As we conclude another successful year, the Membership Committee thanks the members and corporate sponsors who offered financial support and helped the League continue its important work. We're counting on your continued support as we plan projects for 2004.

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### ***About our organization...***

*The Muni News* is published by the Municipal League Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit 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](mailto:muni@munileague.org).

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## **EMPOWERED CITIZENS. INFORMED CHOICES.**