

MUNINEWS



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Inside: Messages from board and committee chairs and volunteers

Are rumors of the demise of print newspapers greatly exaggerated? Do you believe that journalism plays a significant role in helping people and communities to become engaged in solving problems? Does the press have a responsibility to represent the diverse views of the community?

For a discussion on public service journalism, watch *The Muni League Forum* on your local King County government cable channel. Former League chair Rita Brogan hosts this monthly Municipal League program. In October, Rita discussed the press role in civic involvement to ensure an informed, engaged electorate with Mike Fancher, editor-at-large and senior vice president for the Seattle Times. (For a link to this show and the November show with King County charter Freeholders, visit www.munileague.org)

VOICES OF OUR COMMUNITY

Foundation Launches Civic Engagement Project

The mission of the Municipal League and the Municipal League Foundation is *empowered citizens, informed choices*. One key goal of this mission is to facilitate civic dialogue on governance and related issues between the public and local government officials.

Through a generous grant from the city of Seattle, the League Foundation is implementing a special program in furtherance of this goal. Over the next eight months, the Foundation is collaborating with civic-minded organizations and businesses to test web-based methods for facilitating community conversation. Each organization has agreed to engage their own members or constituents in structured discussions about various topics. The founding partners for this project include the Municipal League, the Alliance of Belltown Condominiums, the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, CodeBlueNow!, Hate Free Zone, Real Change News, and the Seattle LGBT Community Center.

Similar to the Municipal League's *Taking the Pulse* survey, each community conversation we host will be followed with a more specific survey resulting in a summary of our participants' opinions. Partners are supported and encouraged to expand their current methods of communication by creating opportunities for members to talk about issues with friends, family, and colleagues, to listen respectfully to their opinions and to contribute their own. Then members are asked to visit their organization's website to participate in a simple web survey designed to determine levels of agreement or disagreement around the issues. This process is not a scientific poll, but rather an opportunity to connect with others and engage people in important community functions of conversation and dialogue in our civic encounters. The results of these surveys will be shared with our public officials and through our website to inform future decisions and discussions sometime in 2007.

"This project is the logical next step for the Municipal League Foundation. We're using technology to help local organizations reach out to their members, provide information on important issues and promote confident civic involvement. It's about our mission: empowered citizens and informed choices," explains Foundation board chair Angela Avery.

So, what topics will we discuss? We are currently filtering ideas with our project partners and intend to announce our selection by year's end. One suggested topic includes transportation. To kick-off this program and introduce you to the internet tool we'll be using, we have placed sample survey questions on our website. Please take the time to visit our webpage and let us know your thoughts. Be sure to identify yourself as a member and supporter of the Municipal League.

Jen Watkins
Foundation Board & League Board

CANDIDATE EVALUATION COMMITTEE MESSAGE

Candidate Evaluations: A Cure for Election Blues

Politics today is plagued by intense polarization, the influence of special interests and big money – or so it might seem. A Harris Poll from earlier this year of the public's confidence in various institutions (the military, Wall Street, the press, etc.) ranked Congress second to last out of 16, *beating out only law firms*. The blizzard of negative ads in the run up to election day only serves to deepen disdain for politics.

It is tempting for voters to paint all politicians with a broad brush and reject the whole system. But there is good cause for hope. Serving on a Municipal League Candidate Evaluation Committee is a powerful remedy for cynicism about politics.

This past summer about 50 volunteers did research on more than 70 candidates for state and local offices, talked to people who know the candidates firsthand, interviewed the candidates and developed *non-partisan* ratings. While candidates vary in their ideas and qualifications, virtually every interview showed that the people running for office care about the issues and want to serve our community.

This year we streamlined the time commitment for our volunteers, down to about two weeks. The key to this improvement was having enough volunteers to share the load. We will need even more volunteers next year.

Starting in 2007, the primary will be moved up to the third Tuesday in August. Candidates must file for office by June 8, 2007. This means that 2007 candidate evaluations will start in about the third week of June. It is not too early to start making plans for next summer. **We need you.**

Dan Berger

Chair, CEC Steering Committee

VOICES OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

I don't know if all volunteers are as picky as I am, but I have pretty stringent requirements for the time I spend helping others. First, I want my efforts to benefit my community. That's easily satisfied as a CEC volunteer, because the goal of serving community is built into the Muni League's mission. Second, I want a tangible sign that my efforts have paid off. For evidence of that, I observe voters taking the Candidate Evaluation report into the voting booth. I feel inordinate pride, not just because I did my small part but also because I served with other dedicated citizens who pulled their weight and pooled their energy for this same cause. And finally, I want the task to challenge my ability to be objective and fair. Evaluating qualified office seekers necessitates keeping partisan thoughts at bay. I knew I was accomplishing this because I often found a gem of a candidate and then discover he or she belonged to another party. CEC committee work gives me hope that government can be about sane, levelheaded people poring over issues and thinking about the best solution for everyone and not just for one party's aggrandizement. CEC is not easy work, the challenge is not trivial, but for us indomitable idealists, the reward is priceless.

Nancy Burkhalter

Vice-chair, Candidate Evaluation Committee

I think that the Municipal League King County provides an invaluable service to the community. I am surprised that other cities or communities do not have anything like the Municipal League. My experience at the Municipal League was nothing but positive. I learned so much about the candidates that I never would have known. But as an intern I had a much different view point than did the candidate evaluators. I was not only able to sit in on the interviews and the candidate investigation reports, but I was also able to meet the candidate before they entered into the interview room. This gave me a unique perspective on the candidate's real personality and what issues they really cared about. I was also allowed to debate them a little and ask them about the issues that I cared about. It was nice to see the candidates for who they really were compared to the show they put on for the public. I hope that this wonderful and truly democratic program will continue to prosper for many years to come.

Alexander Kubacki

CEC High School Intern



Municipal League members discuss outcomes at the primary election night party.

“Serving on a Municipal League Candidate Evaluation Committee is a powerful remedy for cynicism about politics.”

Visit the League website for in-depth information about current issues facing King County
www.munileague.org

“I learned so much about the candidates that I never would have known.”

ISSUES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE SUMMARY 2006

The Issues Management Committee, composed of board members and other community volunteers, oversees the work of several Municipal League committees. The committee had an active year.

Our **transportation subcommittee** did not rest after its work last year studying the monorail and speaking out as one of the first public voices to express serious concerns about the project's financial viability. Moving forward, the committee turned its attention to a number of other transportation issues. Early in the year, we testified in front of the state legislature as to the advisability of restoring the authority of regional, city and county transportation districts and municipalities to levy motor vehicle excise taxes for transportation projects. We expressed concerns to the Seattle City Council over a proposed study of the "No-Build" option for replacing the Alaskan Way viaduct. We are continuing to study issues related to the viaduct versus tunnel debate, RTID developments, Sound Transit, and replacing the Evergreen Floating Bridge. One of our members, Mary Gates, was appointed by Governor Chris Gregoire to serve on the nine-member Regional Transportation Commission, which is tasked with making recommendations on transportation governance and fiscal issues for the Central Puget Sound region.

We continued to monitor issues relating to **Seattle City Light**. When the Seattle City Council allowed the legislation for its energy advisory commission to lapse, the Municipal League urged reinstatement. We spoke out against proposed legislation that would have curtailed the independence of the commission and restricted its ability to advocate for its recommendations. In the end, the City Council re-established the City Light advisory council with out curtailing its ability to provide independent advice to the mayor and council.

Our members also followed the debate over application of **Seattle's Ethics Code** to volunteers who serve on unpaid citizen advisory commissions and boards. We urged the Seattle City Council to adopt legislation that would both balance the interests in obtaining expertise and diverse viewpoints, and would clarify the rules applicable to citizen volunteers.

We followed the activities of the King County Sheriff's Blue Ribbon Panel and studied their report. We look forward to monitoring the County's future efforts to implement the panel's recommendations.

The committee also received updates from our members who serve as League representatives to other boards, commissions and committees. One of our members is the former chair of the county's **Citizen Election Oversight Committee**. Following up on recommendations from that Committee, the King County Council passed four pieces of legislation intended to spur election reform.

Other League members served as representatives to the following projects, coalitions, and activities:

Judicial Selection Coalition

King County Bar Association's Drug Policy Project

Charter Review Commission

The Issues Committee is now forming a study group to look into the issue of the escalating costs of running for public office. We have seen these costs rise for national races, but they are also increasing for regional and local elections. People are expressing concerns that the heightened costs have become barriers to entry for new candidates. Further, fundraising, even for local and regional offices, is now taking an inordinate amount of the time of officeholders – time that many citizens believe would be better spent on governing. The Issues Committee does not have any answers to this problem, but we are starting to look for potential solutions.

Jill Bowman

Chair, Issues Management Committee

The League depends fully on the involvement and expertise of community members to be able to identify key community issues, study those issues and inform the public and public officials. We need your assistance on the committees. And we are interested in hearing your opinions on what key issues the Municipal League should consider addressing in 2007. Drop us a note in the mail or send us an email. We want to hear from you.

BALLOT ISSUES COMMITTEE SUMMARY

The Ballot Issues Committee, under the leadership of former board member Kathy Elias, reviewed and recommended positions on several ballot issues on the King County primary and general election ballots. Many dedicated and experienced volunteers met with proponents and opponents of the issues, then used their myriad of talents and experiences to analyze the data and arguments in order to develop clearly articulated recommendations to the board and, ultimately, the voters.

When the board adopts position after considering the committee's recommendations the statements about these positions were published on the League Voters Guide, our website and distributed to the press. This year we took positions on several local and state-wide ballot issues such as Seattle City charter amendments, I-88, incorporation of Fairwood and I-933. This important, nonpartisan analysis of ballot issues could not happen without the strong work of our volunteers.

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MUNINEWS and the **VotersGuide** are produced by the Municipal League's Communications Committee in coordination with PRR and published by the Municipal League of King County. The Municipal League is nonpartisan and welcomes all points of view. If you have any questions, would like information on joining the Municipal League, or would like to volunteer, call 206-622-8333 or send an email to admin@munileague.org
This issue of **MUNINEWS** was created by Amy Danberg and Jason Thibedeau

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

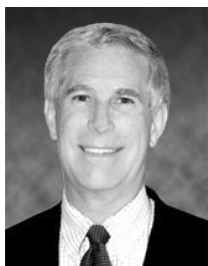
Since 1910 the Municipal League has championed open, honest, effective and professional local government in King County. This year was another successful and productive year for the League in promoting those values.

Our longstanding annual Civic Awards honored community leaders including our Citizen of the Year, Cheryl Scott, at a well attended event at the Space Needle that also helped raise funds for this year's candidate evaluation and rating process.

Our issues committee and other activities this year have also supported our mission in promoting open and effective local government. In support of open government, the League's chair wrote the introduction to the just published Washington State Bar Association's Public Records Act Desk-book and noted the League's role in supporting the 1972 initiative that created one of the most effective public disclosure laws in the country.

In support of effective local government, the League continued to study and report on transportation issues—from the monorail to the viaduct and beyond—and followed up on its reports on Seattle City Light. There is an emerging connection between transportation and utilities which was highlighted in a conference at Microsoft in June on future transportation trends that the League helped organize and moderate. We continue to place special emphasis on governance, including the need to improve regional governance.

Our opinions, studies and recommendation have continued to receive favorable notice in the news media, with the League's positions often quoted in local editorials. Many past and present League members attended the 85th birthday celebration for a past League leader, Jim Ellis, where we heard tributes from across the political spectrum for his and the League's leadership and mission.



Our deep thanks go to our volunteers and board members who make this great organization work. Special thanks go to our volunteers who organized the civic awards and those who committed weeks of their time to the candidate evaluation committees. We are truly an all volunteer group, with one special exception, Jason Thibedeau, our part-time office manager who has kept the day to day operations on track.

Steve Marshall, Chair, Board of Trustees

DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MESSAGE:

Impressed with all the League accomplishes? We cannot support, sustain and grow the work of our volunteers without your generous donations and memberships. If you are deciding on your year-end giving, now is the time to write that check to the Municipal League and the Municipal League Foundation. Your gift in any amount to the Foundation is tax deductible and supports the League programs such as public forums, events and studies of issues. A gift to the Municipal League of King County, in addition to your membership, supports our candidate evaluation and ballot issue programs. Be part of growing our organizations as we move to the League's 100 year anniversary in 2010. Thanks for all of your support.

**Norma Jean Hanson
Bruce Carter**
Development Co-Chairs

HOW CREATIVE ARE OUR MEMBERS?

Looking for creative ways to give to the League? Own a business? Want to provide your patrons with an opportunity to ensure a portion of their money goes to the League? Let's get creative! Here is one example: outgoing board member and real estate agent Tami Ritoch will donate \$500 to the Municipal League for any sale referred to her by a League member. Check out more about Tami at her website www.TamiRitoch.com. Your business, the League and the community all benefit from Tami's creativity and generosity. Can you help the League in this way?

The Municipal League and Municipal League Foundation thank our 2006 members, donors and sponsors.

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