



CIVIC LEAGUE
For New Castle County

Informed Citizens for Sound County Growth

P.O. Box 11523 - Wilmington, DE 19850

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JANUARY
2008

COUNTY COMMENTS

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

Tuesday, January 15, 2008
MEETING

7:00 PM at the Paul Sweeney Public Safety Building
3601 N. duPont Hwy
(Rte 13 South of DMV, North of Gracelawn Cemetery)

AGENDA

Michael Strine

Chief Financial Officer for New Castle County

Topic: Budget Challenges for 2008

Transfer Tax, Union Negotiations,

Status of Law Suits, New Fees

Personnel Negotiations



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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Thinking about Yard Waste, etc.

We were talking about the ban on yard waste last week when we noted another so-called “trash train” going by – as they do regularly. This triggered the question, if they don’t have room for the yard stuff anymore at Cherry Island landfill, how about just putting it in some of those sealed “trash” rail cars and haul it to wherever they’re going.

Then we realized we’d first need to know how many rail cars would be needed, with cost being a factor. So we asked DENREC (Department of Natural Resources & Environment Control) to guesstimate how many cubic yards of yard waste are taken to the landfill each year. While we were at it, we also asked how many cubic yards might be left after the stuff had been in the landfill for a year, and even after five years – knowing that it does tend to shrink.

While awaiting this information, a next natural question came up. What would happen if we put all our solid waste in those rail cars? For one thing, Cherry Island would last forever, and never get any bigger. There would be some cost. But if other east coast cities are doing it, and as we counted them – pulling up to 120 freight cars at a time -why can’t we join them. Either with our own train, or hooking onto one of theirs.

Up ahead we may explore this option for contemporary disposal of yard waste, and perhaps all solid waste. But first, we’ll need to learn just how many cubic feet may be involved. Surely it will be less than for the major cities doing it now.

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

January 15th - Michael Strine

February 19th - Energy Issues

March 18th

April 15th

May 20th

June 17th



The Editor

The following is an excerpt of a letter to State Legislators. This issue will be on the agenda at our January 15th Civic League meeting. We urge you to read it now - in advance of the meeting - and come prepared to offer your reaction and your suggestions. Action now, as the legislature's session begins, will be the most effective.

Delawareans prize their ability to speak directly to their legislators about their concerns and to voice their opinion about legislation. One would expect, then, that the citizens of Delaware enjoy the full benefits of participating in an open and transparent legislative process. You already know that this is not the case.

Senate and House rules that you and your peers adopt at the beginning of every legislative session determine how the business of each chamber will be conducted. In many ways these rules are exemplary, giving citizens the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the legislative process. Unfortunately, some of these rules, particularly in the Senate, threaten to make a sham of the legislative process.

The Senate rule that allows committee chairs to exercise the "desk drawer veto" gives a select few legislators the power to deny the majority of Delaware's elected representatives, in both the House and Senate, the right to introduce legislation with the expectation that it will at least be given an open and fair committee hearing. Senate rules that do not require a quorum to conduct committee hearings and that do not require agendas to be posted beforehand invite abuse. We ask that you do your part to replace them with rules requiring that all bills be heard in committee, that all committee hearings have a quorum, and that agendas specifying legislation by number be posted one week before the hearing.

Rules that prohibit ordinary citizens from filing professional ethics complaints against senators and representatives, deny them the right to effectively challenge corrupt and abusive conduct. Rules that enable citizens to challenge inept and corrupt legislative conduct do work. Will you help us adopt such rules?

Rules, that allow legislators to introduce legislation in the dead of night during the last few hours of a legislative session with no committee hearings and no citizen participation and that force legislators to vote on bills they cannot possibly have read or understand, pervert the legislative process and make a mockery of the General Assembly. Can we count on you to vote for rules that give legislators time to read and evaluate bills before they vote on them?

When a small clique can usurp control of the legislative process, all our rights are diminished. People are getting angry and are asking themselves why the legislators they voted for shackle themselves with rules that prevent them from serving the citizens who elected them to office.

Committed citizens, along with a few courageous legislators, have struggled to change these rules for years, with no success, but, now, a groundswell of support for reform is growing, and has reached a point where change is possible. When Delaware looks back on this opportunity to make Delaware's legislative process open and transparent, how will you be remembered? Will history call you a part of the problem or a part of the solution?"

We also urge you to contact your members and urge them to call or write their senators urging them to pledge to support reform.

It will not be easy to change the minds of some senators, but this is an election year and that gives us some extra leverage. Please join us.

Chuck Landry
President
CCOBH

Transparency in Schools, Too

Recent disclosures in the Red Clay school district have drawn attention to the desirability of more transparency in the financial operations of tax-payer supported schools.

Much attention is being given to the benefits of having operations of governments at all levels open to public observation. Now it appears that similar openness may also be an idea whose time has come for schools.

It is virtually impossible for the public to meaningfully understand any details about where their school supporting funds are being spent. That's because the accounting and reporting systems are different for each school district, and for no district is there a standard way of describing what is being paid for.

One way to make school finances more transparent is adopt a financial budgeting and reporting system based on Object of Expenditure Reports. The basis for this system already exists within the state's financial system.

In order for invoices to be paid for the school districts by the state, each purchase order must include an object code and the source of funding. So object codes are already utilized by the districts. An object code is simply a standard numerical code which describes a category of expenditures – text books, salaries, professional services, etc.

The process would begin in each district by establishing a budget based on object codes. This would then permit each school district to issue monthly financial reports showing money spent in specific categories vs amounts budgeted. (Note: Two school districts have tried this practice and discontinued it.)

Administrators would have greater control over their expenditures, school board members could more clearly review operations for which they are responsible, and taxpayers could have more confidence in the prudent fiscal management of their schools. The state currently provides each district with a monthly object of expenditure report. The budgeted amount can be entered into the state's system and the districts, in turn, would get this monthly report on expenditures vs budget by percentage, year-to-date

Changeover to his object code procedure could be accomplished almost immediately and without any disruption of operations.

The Editor

For the latest updates, meeting delays or cancellations due to inclement weather,
check our website:

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