



CIVIC LEAGUE For New Castle County

Informed Citizens for Sound County Growth

P.O. Box 11523 - Wilmington, DE 19850

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**January
2011**

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.

Chuck Mulholland,
President

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COUNTY COMMENTS

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

MEETING

Tuesday, January 18, 2011

7:00 PM at the Delaware State Police Troop 2 Building
100 La Grange Avenue
(Rte 40 East of Route 896)

AGENDA

Preparation of Legislative Agenda

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Current Resident or

Moving forward.... suggestions from the Board of Directors

Nominate someone for a RUNAROUND HERO AWARD !

Most of us have gotten a runaround from time to time. The usual prompt: You aim a piercing question at a government official. In return, you get answers to numerous questions you DIDN'T ask rather than one that fits YOUR question. Giving you the runaround - - especially when you don't instantly recognize that he told you nothing - - requires great skill on the official's part. As advocates for Good Government, we should recognize conspicuous demonstrations of high achievement. The RUNAROUND HERO AWARD will fulfill that need. Your nominations are invited.

composed by Vic Singer

New Castle County Comprehensive Plan Update Public Involvement Meeting Schedule

- Thur, December 2, 2010 - Kickoff meeting
- Wed, January 12, 2011 - Land Use
- Wed, January 26, 2011 - Land Use
- Wed, February 9, 2011 - Mobility & Transportation
- Wed, February 23, 2011 - Water and Sewer
- Wed, March 9, 2011 - Conservation and Natural Resources
- Wed, March 23, 2011 - Historic Preservation and Housing
- Wed, April 13, 2011 - Economic Development
- Wed, April 27, 2011 - Community Design
- Wed, May 11, 2011 - Inter-governmental Coordination
- Wed, May 25, 2011 - Inter-governmental Coordination
- Wed, June 8, 2011 - Future Land Use & Implementation Strategies

All meetings are to be held from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. in the multi-purpose room at the New Castle County Government Center - Gillian Building, 77 Reads Way, New Castle, DE 19720.

Dates and/or topics are subject to change. This schedule will be updated on the project web site: <http://projects.jmt.com/new-castle-county-comprehensive-plan/Default.aspx> Interested persons may sign up at this web site for automatic updates and newsletters.

Interested persons may also "follow us" on Twitter at www.twitter.com/NewCastle_2012 to receive the fastest updates, including any last minute meeting changes which may occur due to weather emergencies.

Questions may be sent by email to: CompPlan12@nccde.org

CORRECTING FLOODING PROBLEMS

When I was serving on the Planning Board in the mid-90s, the County decided to forbid new construction in the 100-year flood plains. This action was considered necessary to protect not only the people who might reside and work in buildings that would otherwise be prone to flooding in the future, but it was supposed to protect rescue personnel. Severe, wide-spread flooding is life-threatening; it destroys communities; it threatens the health of people for years afterward; it damages roads, sewers, and utility lines we have to pay to replace; it can bankrupt insurance companies or the uninsured; and it damages the environment. Often all the destruction and debris clogging streams in the aftermath of a flood is never cleared; so they pose a future threat and create more flooding when culverts are blocked by it.

Flooding that reaches or exceeds the 100-year level is occurring more often only 15 years after the County law that was thought to be adequate to protect us far into the future was passed. This law, of course, could not go back and affect the structures already built, as those of you who live in older low-lying areas near streams know. If you have experienced highway construction in your neighborhood, you don't even need to live near a stream to experience flooding in major storms. Changes in road elevation can create backed up water in many places, but that is not necessarily as instantly threatening as a fast moving stream that travels through our Piedmont Plateau where the constant drop in the creek bottoms creates the speed. That's why the Red Clay, Brandywine, and White Clay Creeks are so dangerous.

We have seen catastrophic flooding and storms all over the world in the past year. For an idea of how serious this is, check out the Weather Channels report called Extreme October. New records are being set for instability in the atmosphere due to global warming. Delaware normally has an ideal climate-moderate in every way. How long it will take for our climate to become more severe is anyone's guess, but the future will certainly be more tolerable if we prepare for it. We will not continue to escape the full fury of Nature. Just knowing that an Asian country received 45 inches of rain in 48 hours makes me realize how lucky we have been. We may never see that much water, but we are going to see things get worse before anything man does to control global warming reverses the trend.

One way I believe we must prepare is to clear our flood plains of buildings at risk where possible. Another is to make cleaning out our creeks a priority. A third is to write regulations that keep new construction out of flood plains to perhaps a 200 year level. A fourth is to create incentives for building flood resistant structures or lifting and improving older ones. A fifth may be to deepen and remove some of the man-made erosion-control paving used to line creeks in the past. Sixth, we may have to divert some streams. Let me explain these possibilities:

6 - Stream diversion is generally a bad idea from an environmental standpoint. It interferes with the ecology of a region. However, there may be situations where the number of residences and businesses in an area are so numerous and so likely to be flooded that no other solutions make sense. Elsmere, for example, is so densely populated that allowing it to continue to be subjected to flooding is irresponsible. We cannot realistically move the people out. The expense of repairing the problem culvert that is not wide enough to handle the amount of water that comes downstream is so great that DelDOT has been unable to find the money to do it. Two streams meet in Elsmere. Could they be redirected? Where would one find enough open land to send the water safely?

5- This brings us to the deepening solution. There are places where small creeks were paved on the bottom. I have observed that doing that has caused flooding in downstream parts of the county as more and more development was created upstream from the initial one. One foolish example is the ditch behind Widener Law School. As shopping centers have been built north of it, the depth of the ditch is really insufficient. The same is true for a culvert in Elsmere that prevents the erosion of the stream bank next to a business. These need to be dug far deeper and perhaps major pipes buried to carry the amount of water that will threaten the low-lying classroom buildings and dorms in the future. WLS has survived

because a golf course is across the ditch and it absorbs water. I don't know if the flat Concord Mall north of it and the Fairfax Shopping Center have any other way of displacing water from the same creek, but I would expect they do. I have seen an entire huge older shopping center in North Carolina utterly destroyed by flooding. The economic consequences for the area were devastating. Structures built 50 years ago did not have to worry about the kinds of storms we have been getting in 2010, so the adequacy of this "ditch" today should be examined with an eye to future problems. The same is true for the Elsmere situation, and anywhere else such a technique was used.

4- Flood resistant and elevated "green" structures have been designed for New Orleans, and I suspect a little online research would show that some architects and engineers have improved the flood-resistance of their products created for waterfront living in many resort areas. We should encourage such construction inland where older communities are being rebuilt and anything is built near running water. Perhaps we could find the money needed to build such a low-cost green housing project near New Castle that would relieve their flooding problems and test what state-of-the-art engineering can provide.

3- The Army Corps of Engineers has not yet redrawn the flood-plain maps, but they are in the process. We have had enough flooding to anticipate what they will show in some areas and improve the requirements for building in them even before those are finished. That includes improving the way we build highways.

2- The County lacks personnel (due to the financial crisis) to clean out all the creeks, but property owners could take more responsibility. Volunteers are helping in the parks. Can we find Friends of the Streams to help out?

1-The real challenge will be initiating change where older structures are getting hit repeatedly or are truly threatened. I have seen how toxic mold can affect the brains and nervous system of a family who lived in a once-flooded house and it was awful to see. We must not allow families to get trapped in houses that have been badly flooded. If insurance pay-offs take months to collect or there is no insurance, if families need to move out and cannot afford to do so, or if elderly and disabled people are unaware of the mold growing around them, society will pay a price. We need to develop a package of incentives to encourage people to rebuild, lift homes or businesses above the flood levels, or have agencies or governments take actions before trouble drives people away from a community they have called home for decades.

A County or State Task Force should be created to research and recommend solutions quickly. While our planners are not as busy, they could staff the Task Force. We need to have all elements of the communities come together to set realistic goals and priorities-bankers, builders, engineers, environmentalists, homeowners, local officials, and civic leaders. Older communities have a lot at stake. The time to act is now. The Governor could get this started and ask each county to form its own subcommittees. This type of planning could stimulate the creation of more jobs in the long run if done properly. Need I say more?

Opinion of Christine Whitehead