

LWVMS LOCAL PROGRAM*
May 2010 – April 2011

Mission Statement: The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

RESOLUTION: Be it resolved by the League of Women Voters of the Mid-Shore that a consideration of population diversity in the mid-shore area shall be a part of any study and or action the League is conducting. (1993, amended 2004)

GOVERNMENT

MID-SHORE REGIONAL COUNCIL (MSRC), Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot County, a cooperative planning and economic development agency funded by Federal, State and counties.

Action and support of MSRC for the following:

1. Public participation and public awareness of programs/projects:
 - Membership of the council is representative of the diverse population of the 3 counties with an open process for appointing those non-elected members.
 - Meetings are held in public places, e.g. libraries, government meeting rooms, welcoming to the public.
 - Meeting notifications with agenda are posted in news media and on websites.
2. Organizational Transparency:
 - The membership of the Board and Executive Committee are posted in the news media and website whenever changes occur.
 - Current financial reports are available to the public on websites/in libraries.
 - Program/projects results are reported in a timely manner at the local county and town government meetings, in the news media and on the MSRC website.
 - Evaluation of programs/project by relevant agencies providing the funding is made public.
3. Projects/programs will address the needs of the counties' diverse population.
4. MSRC will develop priorities/goals that unite all 3 counties and their towns in areas such as:
 - Regional land use
 - Resource conservation
 - Environmental protection
5. Base funding is maintained and grants are sought to fund other priority projects.

Background: In 2005 and 2006, the League studied the authority, purpose, goals and current projects of the Mid-Shore Regional Council. A fact sheet summary of findings was published in 2006 and a meeting held for members and the public with Royce Hanson, expert on Regional Planning. Study continued in 2006-07 comparing MSRC with the four (4) other rural regional councils in Maryland. Consensus was held on 10/24/07 and final position approved 11/28/07.

Outlook for Work: Continue to monitor MSRC meetings. Develop communication with Executive Direction and Council on our position. Consider an educational activity to enlighten the public on Broadband and its value.

FISCAL POLICY: The League of Women Voters of the Mid-Shore supports action to support progressive taxes over proportional and regressive taxes, supports certain criteria that should be used to evaluate revenue sources, and supports local revenue sources for Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties according to a prioritized list of preferred local taxes or fees. (1994; Dorchester concurred 2007)

Support for:

1. Use of the following criteria to evaluate a local revenue source:
 - a. Equitable-fairly distributed and not unduly burdensome for any one group. Equity is related to the ability to pay and the benefit received.

- b. Certain-easy to understand and difficult to avoid
- c. Convenient-inexpensive and efficient to collect
- d. Adequate-sufficient to finance the needs of government
- e. Diverse and flexible-so that economic fluctuations will not undermine the tax base

2. The preferred sources of revenue for Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties in the following order of priority:

- a. Local income tax
- b. Real property tax
- c. Service charges
- d. Impact fees on business and residential development
- e. Property Transfer and Recordation taxes
- f. Taxes on Sales and Services/Admissions and Amusement taxes
- g. Personal (business) property tax

Background: In 1996 the League testified and lobbied against the Talbot County Council's proposal to raise notably more revenue from property taxes than income tax. The Council lowered the income tax rate from 55% to 40% of state income tax, while increasing the property tax rate. (Dorchester concurred 2007)

Outlook for Work: Monitor Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Government Agencies

TALBOT COUNTY DETENTION CENTER: Action to monitor the operation of the jail facility guided by American Correctional Advisory standards. (1986, revised 1993)

Support for:

- 1. a facility with adequate space allocations for visitation, recreation, and educational, medical (including mental health and addictions counseling), vocational and religious needs
- 2. A facility with adequate space for staff offices, 911 emergency, and related service departments
- 3. A facility operated and maintained so as to provide a safe, secure, and humane environment for all the inmates and correctional personnel

Outlook for Work: Action as needed to insure the facility is in compliance with the above positions, and position of the LWVMD on Corrections, especially in providing a humane physical and psychological setting, useful activities and adequate programs with the provision for educational and rehabilitative services, and in meeting the needs of a diverse prison population. Examine the correctional facilities in Caroline and Dorchester Counties using the same criteria listed above for Talbot County.

TALBOT COUNTY CHARTER PROVISIONS AND AMENDMENTS: Action to support certain criteria to evaluate any amendment to the Talbot County Charter and support only those amendments that meet the criteria. (1994, revised 1997)

Support for the following criteria:

Any provision of or amendment to the Talbot County charter must:

- Conform with the Constitution of Maryland and any Public General Law
- Either create or amend the form and structure of government
- Be able to function efficiently over the long-term, to avoid creating problems in the future
- Allow the government to meet its responsibility to provide for the needs of the people
- Ensure responsible government and promote good fiscal planning and
- Neither penalize nor protect unduly special segments of the population

The authority to enact local legislation, which is derived directly from the Constitution of Maryland, vests all local law making power in the Talbot County Council, the elected representatives of the citizens. Because we vigorously support the principle of representative government, we believe our elected representative must take responsibility of the decisions of government. Finally, we believe that only those amendments to the county charter that would not limit the County Council's constitutional authority should be supported.

Background: In the fall of 1994, the League opposed three proposed charter amendments on the basis that they were probably illegal. The electorate defeated all three amendments. Through the study it was learned the Talbot County property tax limitation, adopted as a charter amendment in 1978, might be illegal. In January 1995, the League joined the Board of Education and others in a legal challenge of the tax cap. The plaintiffs' arguments to the circuit court and the Court of Appeals reflected the reasoning develop in our study. In May 1995, the Court of Appeals announced that the tax cap was unconstitutional. The League

worked to oppose two competing charter amendment proposals to limit county property tax revenues on the November 1996 ballot, through public forums, guest commentary in the newspaper and letter to the editor. The more restrictive of the proposed amendments was passed by the voters. During 2001 and 2002, the League testified in support of a bill and referendum that would increase the salaries of County Council members. The League also stressed the need to remove salaries from the Charter. The referendum passed in 2002.

Outlook for Work: Continue action as appropriate.

NATURAL RESOURCES

WASTE MANAGEMENT: Action to promote environmentally sound management of waste and hazardous waste and to educate the public on the various disposal alternatives. (1987, revised 1993, updated 1994).

Support for:

1. Programs to identify and collect household hazardous wastes.
2. Efforts to reduce the volume and toxicity of waste at its source.
3. Private and public recycling programs.
4. Implementation of policies to protect groundwater supplies.

Outlook for Work: (updated 1994): Use broad Natural Resources positions of the LWVUS to monitor local issues and act where appropriate.

LAND USE/GROWTH MANAGEMENT: Action to promote the establishment of coordinated land use plans between Talbot and Dorchester Counties and their towns and unincorporated villages. (1996, 2004) Action to promote the establishment of design and development standards for Talbot and Dorchester Counties and their communities to achieve land use plans that meet the changing goals and needs of their citizens (2000, 2004). The process for establishing design and development standards should be based equally on the following League of Women Voters principles.

Broad-based participation of the public with consideration of the needs of all the citizens
Visioning that is ongoing, dynamic and forward-looking
Consideration of environment and natural resources

Support for:

Multi-government decision making on land use and growth management issues such as:

Coordination or comprehensive plan issues; Critical Area issues; Community services and facilities;
Rural and agricultural conservation; Natural resources conservation;

Location/annexation; Housing;

Public Waterfront access; Infrastructure; Parks and recreation; Residential and design and development standards categories such as:

Density of both structures and population; Preservation of natural resources; environment, open space, adequate public facilities and services including parks and recreation; aesthetics; compatibility of buildings and site plan with surroundings, balance of commercial/industrial and residential structures; transportation requirements and traffic impact; historic preservation.

Background: In 1997-8, a committee was formed to investigate government impact on Land Use. An outcome of the student was a proposed and approved study for 1998-99 of community design standards. As the study progressed the committee discovered that as a first step of this study we should address the issue of cooperative county and town land use and growth management planning. A consensus was reached in February 1999. The original study was resumed in 1999-00 and consensus was reached on community design and development standards in January 2000. In the fall of 2001, 8 League members participated on citizen committees for the update of the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan. In March 2002, the league sponsored a forum on water quality, aquifers, and septic systems for the 88 members of citizens' advisory committees and the public. In 2003-04, League members participated in preparing the final draft of the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan, as members of the citizens' steering committee and by presenting testimony on the draft plan in a workshop with the Planning and Zoning Commission. Monitoring of the Planning and Zoning Commission workshops to finalize a plan to present to the County Council continued during the first half of 2004. In 2003-04, the Dorchester County LWVTC unit concurred with the LWVTC position and presented three public forums on land use and water quality. In 2004-05, the LWVTC continued to present testimony to the Talbot County Council on the draft Comprehensive Plan. The Plan was approved in February, 2005.

Outlook for Work: Study land use application and approval processes. Present testimony when appropriate to government agencies in support of multi-government decision making in land use decisions and the development of design standards; develop coalitions with other organization with compatible positions, and seek funding for the county and town to support the process of developing design standards. Continue to participate in County (Talbot and Dorchester) and towns' Comprehensive Plan updates. Monitor and prepare testimony on Zoning Ordinance changes resulting from the new Comprehensive Plans.

SOCIAL POLICY:

EDUCATION: Action to support quality education for all students in the Talbot, Caroline, and Dorchester County Public School Systems (1996, amended 2004)

Support for:

- High expectations for every student, clearly communicated to students, parents, teachers and administrators
- A curriculum that:
 - Is academically challenging and stimulating; Is consistent over time, sequential in design, and coordinated county-wide (K-12); Has integrated subject matter throughout (K-12); Offers enrichment programs (K-12); Provides effective reading curriculum including specific instruction in phonics; Offers honors programs (secondary); Offers Advanced Placement courses (secondary); Offers academically demanding career and technology (secondary).
- Skilled and qualified teachers who have majored or minored in the subject they teach.
- A program available to all 4-year olds in every elementary school.
- Extending school day and/or school year with the goal of improved educational opportunities and achievement.
- Eliminating the statistical difference among ethnic groups on the Maryland statewide test scores.
- Programs that expect and encourage parental support.
- Financial support at the county level that reflects the vital importance of education

Background: In April 1995, the League of Women Voters of Talbot County recommended an education study. The committee worked to define a quality education and to identify the necessary goals and strategies that would assure its availability to each child in Talbot County. In March 1998, consensus was reached on the items found to be necessary for a quality education. The committee found a need for a Gifted and Talented Program in the schools, but wished to make it clear that it does not favor any form of tracking: all students should be encouraged to audition for all programs. In May 1998, the committee testified before the Board of Education on a new proposal for Easton Middle School that included changing from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous grouping. The committee testified in March of 2000 before the Board of Education concerning teacher salaries. Committee members observed the budget process through the County Council in 2000 and 2001.

Outlook for Work: Monitor local education issues, including appropriate class sizes. Advocate and testify on education programs and financing before the appropriate legislative bodies. Network with other community groups to support our position.

HEALTH CARE: - *Mid-Shore Mental Health Study*

Research and encourage public understanding and awareness of mental health issues in Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties; examine the availability of and access to mental health resources and services; assess major needs in this area.

Background: Study adopted in 2010. Background needs to be developed.

Outlook for Work: Needs to be developed.

HOUSING: Action to develop a local housing policy responsive to the need for more quality affordable housing. (1987, revised 1993)

Support for: Creation of quality affordable housing; non-discrimination in housing.

Background: In 2001, LWVTC joined the Welfare Reform Coalition consisting of the Chamber of Commerce, the Department of Social Services, and the LWVTC. A public forum on *Life After Welfare* was held on March

2001. In March 2002, the Welfare Reform Coalition narrowed its focus to affordable rental housing and became the Affordable Rental Housing Coalition. Simultaneously, a LWVTC committee began investigating existing rentals. In 2003-04, the League recommended that language be included in the County and Easton Town Comprehensive Plans supporting scheduled inspections of rental housing. The League submitted suggested language that was adopted by the Town of Easton and in fundamental nature by Talbot County. Subsequently the League published a booklet covering eh rights and responsibilities of landlord and tenants, which was widely disseminated and well received. The League has suggested to the Town and County that they continue publication of the booklet on an as-needed basis. Capitalizing on its research the LWBTC committee presented a paper to the Easton Town Council outlining Options to Consider in Drafting an Inspection Ordinance. (Adopted study 2007)

Outlook for Work: Continue to advocate for a scheduled rental inspection ordinance and monitor enforcement of the housing provisions of the Comprehensive Plans in accord with our membership in the Affordable Housing Coalition of Talbot County. Examine affordable housing policies in Caroline and Dorchester Counties.

* General Outlook for Work: When one or two counties are mentioned, the LWVMS will be working on the appropriate studies that will make these positions valid in all three counties. (Adopted 2010)