

LWVMC POSITIONS FOR ACTION

Local Position on Executive Sessions - adopted May 1999: Revised May 2007

[This position makes more explicit LWVUS positions of 1972, '73 & '74 favoring open government. The Position attempts to address the increasing problems of public distrust, cynicism and subsequent citizen disengagement from government matters. It focuses on those areas of government business in which closed sessions are used extensively in the County and Towns. The presumption is that elected officials can and should take additional steps to reduce distrust. It does not preclude the roles of the public and the media in this endeavor.]

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County requests the County and Towns consider these recommendations for implementing the Virginia Freedom of Information Act:

- a. eliminate the presumption of secrecy in deliberations of public officials merely because an issue is “sensitive” politically, since the public’s need to understand the process of decision making is paramount to the success of a democratic government.
- b. reduce the time spent in secret discussions about personnel matters, particularly when the discussion is about appointments of final candidates for public service positions.
- c. narrow the exemption from openness in order to obtain legal advice to strategy planning when there is actual pending litigation .
- d. emphasize the presumption of openness of all deliberations of public officials by requiring that agendas of public bodies list all items for open discussion. A public official wishing to close a meeting would need to justify that action by explaining how the harms outweigh the benefits of openness for each item that will be discussed. Time limits for retaining a (required) tape and minutes of the closed meeting should be mentioned in the minutes of open meeting and should reflect the expectation that information will be made available to the public when the clear reason for secrecy no longer exists. In addition any action or votes that occur as the result of secret deliberations must be publicly and specifically explained.
- e. exclude the routine use of closed sessions to discuss real estate and property matters, particularly when competitive offers may help the public interest and when “usage” and “condition” of properties is the topic

Local Position on Redistricting and Reapportionment: Adopted May 1991, revised May 12, 2008

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, cognizant that the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors will redistrict the County in 2011, as required by law, makes the following recommendations:

- a. that each election district “shall be so constituted as to give as nearly as is practicable, representation in proportion to the population of the district,” as provided in the Constitution of Virginia, Article VII, Sec. 5.
- b. that the numbers of registered voters should be distributed as equally as possible among the districts, while complying with other provisions of laws and directives. (Most students residing on the campus of VPI&SU are not registered locally to vote. Apportioning this bloc of residents in approximately equal numbers among the adjoining districts would avoid the imbalance in numbers of registered voters between the districts which currently exists. At the same time, it would deprive no one of the right to register and vote nor would it affect participation by dormitory students in Town of Blacksburg elections.)
- c. that incumbency should not be a prime consideration in drawing election district lines.
- d. that the Board of Supervisors, as in the past, should appoint a committee including citizens representing each of the existing election districts to study and submit proposals for redistricting. Local guidelines, staff support and computer services should be provided.

Local Position on Budget-making Process: Adopted May 14, 1983, revised May 15, 2007 and May 12, 2008

To advocate informed citizen participation in the formulation of the annual budgets of the County and the Towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg and to promote a budget document which:

- is understandable to all interested citizens
- is readily available
- is in a format easy to read and handle
- contains a statement that reflects the priorities and goals of each local government’s financial policy
- provides for long-range planning
- gives a true picture of each local government’s finances
- is a working document in that any deviation or transfer there from be allowed only by action of the appropriate governing body and is consistent with the Code of Virginia.