

Changes Recommended in LWVMC Positions for Action to the Annual Meeting May 15, 2007

During the January 2007 Program Planning a majority said they thought that some of the Montgomery County League's local positions needed to be revised or dropped. The Board, at its meeting on January 17, appointed an ad hoc committee to look at the local positions and make their recommendations to the Board. Two members who have worked on studies that have led to local action positions, Lindsay West and Mary Swiger met on February 6 along with Mary Houska to review the LWVMC Positions for Action. The Board approved the committee's recommendations at its February 14 meeting. The full text of the LWVMC Positions for Action is on pp. 13-14 in the latest Handbook. Here are the recommendations to the 2007 LWVMC Annual Meeting to change or drop LWVMC Positions for Action:

Local Position on Executive Sessions: The committee's problem was with the introductory sentence, "The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County supports any revisions of the State Freedom of Information Law or of interpretations of the current law which would:" The committee suggests substituting the following introduction: *"The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County requests the County and Towns consider these recommendations for implementing the Virginia Freedom of Information Act."*

Local Position on Redistricting & Reapportionment: The committee recommends no changes to this position.

Local Position on Assessment of Real Property: The committee suggests dropping this local position because the recommendations are no longer appropriate or are out of date. One part of the position, the requirement for using professional assessors for County-wide reassessments, is now a County policy. The first and third part of the position advocates annual rather than four-year assessments and, therefore, an annually appointed Equalization Board. Recently, the Board of Supervisors requested that staff analyze the cost/benefits of professional biennial or annual reassessments. Right now, the County employs two staff assessors for evaluating new construction and major renovation of existing property. These properties are evaluated at what the value would have been at the time of the last assessment. Cost/Benefits: The state requires that if a reassessment increases tax revenue more than 1%/year, either the tax rate must be lowered or it will be regarded as a tax increase and the County must advertise and hold public hearings as they would for an increase in the tax rate. In other words, the state regards any tax revenue gain from reassessment of existing property that exceeds 1% as a tax increase. Note, the state does allow increases in total assessed value above that 1% from new construction. The last section of the positions reads, "improved by utilizing additional data processing, levying a service charge on exempt properties, and by requiring frequent application for property to remain in exempt status." The data processing is now computerized and all assessments are accessible to all citizens through the GIS on the County and Towns' web sites. The biggest exempt properties are: VA Tech, RAAP, and the National Forest. The County can do nothing to affect the exempt status of these properties. To badger small non-profits about their exempt status makes no sense to the committee.

The Local Position on Budget-making Process: The introductory statement for this position reads, "To advocate informed citizen participation in the formulation of the County's annual budget ...". The committee recommends rewording that introduction as follows: *"To advocate informed citizen participation in the formulation of the annual budgets of the County and the Towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg..."*