

The
OTER

VOLUME 44 NUMBER 10

November-December 2005

Calendar (League activities in bold)

November 2005

- 15 Tu 6:00 p.m. County Freeholder Caucus
16th floor, Camden Co. Courthouse, Camden
- 16 W 10:00 a.m. **Voter Registration**
After the naturalization ceremony, Federal Courthouse, Camden.
- 17 Th 7:00 p.m. County Freeholder Meeting
The Camden Technology Center/Learning Theater, 601 Cooper St. Camden NJ
- 17 Th 7 - 9 p.m. **LWVCC public meeting**
Judy Cambria, LWVNJ fiscal policy specialist, will discuss the school funding issue. All welcome. Rohrer Library, Haddon Township.
- 19 Sa 8:30 - 3 pm **85th Anniversary Conference**
Come help us celebrate women's suffrage at the Trenton Marriot and War Memorial.

December 2005

- 7 W 6:30-9 **Program Planning/Holiday Party**
Home of Bobbie Porter
- 13 Tu 6:00 p.m. County Freeholder Caucus
16th floor, Camden Co. Courthouse, Camden

- 15 Th 7:00 p.m. County Freeholder Meeting
Haddonfield Borough Hall, Auditorium

January 2006

- 4 W 7:30 p.m. **LWVCC Board Meeting**

At its Nov. 2005 meeting the LWVCC board:

1. Decided to order 100 copies of the membership book, and aim to distribute them at the Program Planning meeting.
2. Decided to do both e-mail and phone tree to notify members about the school funding meeting Nov 17.
3. Decided to try a different approach to program planning this year, involving small group discussions and presentations.

Fiscal Policy Talk -- School Construction Issues

Come hear fiscal policy specialist Judy Cambria, the LWVNJ's well known, long-time activist on education and fiscal policy. She'll bring us up to speed and answer questions. This is certain to be an informative meeting. Nov. 17, Rohrer Library, Haddon Township.

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CAMDEN COUNTY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

As we move beyond the gubernatorial election, I encourage all League members to become more involved in taking steps to ensure that our legislative members work diligently to restore fiscal soundness to the State of New Jersey. Since the devastation of Katrina, I have become more concerned about our own state of preparedness. As we approach our program-planning meeting, scheduled for December 7th, we will be preparing to address fiscal issues that may be affecting Camden County taxpayers. (See the section on program planning, page 3).

For a better understanding of the scope and complexity of some of the issues we are addressing, such as the fiscal soundness of the School Construction Corporation, we have invited Judith Cambria, the state League expert in fiscal policy and education, to address the local League at a public meeting on November 17th, 2005 (see first page of the Voter). Judy will address the subject of the School Construction Corporation and make recommendations for action steps that the Camden County League can take under consideration for implementation in the New Year. All League members should attend this very important meeting and invite others who need to be aware of the state of their school construction projects. Many schools in Camden County may go without much needed repairs, because of the fiscal state of the SCC.

Now is the time to learn as much as we can, so if necessary, we will be prepared to take action.

I look forward to seeing you on November 17th, at 7:00 pm at the William G. Rohrer Memorial Library Haddon Township branch.

Ann Saunders

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization of men and women that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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Getting there - Directions!

Camden County Courthouse: Take 676 north to Mickle Blvd. Flow right at the fork (don't go on Campbell Place), then turn right onto 5th street in a few blocks. The courthouse is at 5th and Federal, a block up from Mickle.

Camden, Federal Courthouse: 4th and Cooper, but we generally car pool. Call 856-795-7878 if you're interested. *About 3-4 blocks from the City Hall PATCO station.*

Camden: Camden Technology Center/Learning Theater, 601 Cooper St. Take 676 into Camden. Exit at Mickle Blvd., and promptly turn right onto Haddon Ave. Haddon soon becomes 7th. Watch for Cooper. Turn left there. The building is in that block on Cooper.

Haddonfield Borough Hall: 242 Kings Highway E. at King's Highway and Haddon Avenue, Haddonfield. Coming west on King's Highway (from Cherry Hill) turn left on Haddon, then left again just past post office to enter municipal parking lot from the rear. *About a 5-10 minute walk from the Haddonfield PATCO station, going north on Kings Highway.*

Haddon Township: Rohrer Library: Take 295 to Route 30 north. On 30, pass King's Highway. In about a mile after King's Highway, just after Nicholson Road on the left, you'll see Cuthbert Road on the right. Turn right onto Cuthbert from 30. Stay on Cuthbert for about half a mile. Just past Hopkins, turn right onto MacArthur. The library is at that corner. // This is the same Cuthbert Road that becomes Cuthbert Blvd further north at routes 70 and 38, so you could take it south from there. MacArthur is about 0.8 miles south of Haddon Avenue on Cuthbert Blvd.

Program Planning

We hope to see a good turnout of League members for the annual party and program planning meeting on Dec 7th at Bobbie Porter's house. There will be, as always, a variety of tasty dishes and desserts, plus plenty of good company.

The real business of program planning this year is to provide sage advice to LWVUS on its positions. Which ones should be retained, which ones maybe discarded, or perhaps revisited in an update? In some cases, a local League will suggest an entirely new topic for the LWVUS to study, leading to a position on that topic.

To liven things up, we plan to try a new strategy this year -- putting attendees into small groups to learn about and discuss related positions, then report back any comments to the larger group. Come help us implement the new idea! Learn about our positions, give feedback to national. An interesting evening.

And we need to discuss our local positions as well (for presentation at the Annual Meeting). These are:

1. Propose and support improved methods of **financing political campaigns**, including contribution and expenditure disclosure and limits, and a system of public and private funding for campaigns.
2. Encourage **voter participation and education** through activities such as voter registration, candidate forums, public meetings, and publications.
3. Support county and municipal efforts to **preserve open space**.
4. Continue to actively **monitor county government**, which may include attending regular and caucus Freeholder meetings. make statements on League positions when appropriate.

***THE ROLE OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN
OUR DAILY LIVES
Part 2
Camden County Administrator
Ross G. Angilella***

The Camden County Board of Freeholders, like all other freeholder boards in the State of New Jersey, acts by adopting resolutions. Resolutions are written documents that the Freeholder Board votes on at its monthly meeting. Resolutions authorize the execution of contracts as well as the adoption of formal county policies; support or oppose proposed federal or state legislation; take formal action on personnel matters and litigation involving the county; and delegate certain duties to the various departments that make up County government. In short, the Freeholders take legislative and executive action by adopting resolutions, instead of passing bills.

The process of adopting a resolution usually begins with a request for a resolution being generated at the departmental level. For example, in order to offer County residents free flu shots each winter, the County's Health Department must work with the County's Purchasing Agent to buy flu vaccine. Once the proper procedures have been followed, the Director of the Health Department will request that a resolution authorizing the purchase be listed for the next available Freeholder meeting.

Freeholder meetings are conducted in a two-part process. First, the Freeholders meet at a caucus, usually held every third Tuesday of the month, where resolutions are publicly read and discussed, if need be. In this way the caucus helps the Freeholders prepare for the regular meeting by giving them an opportunity to solidify their knowledge of the pending resolutions. The public portion of the caucus lasts approximately an hour and is web cast live. After the public portion of the caucus, the Freeholders recess into a closed or executive session at which they discuss personnel matters, litigation, and other sensitive issues as permitted by the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act. In accordance with that law, the minutes of any executive session are subsequently made available to the public.

It's easy to confuse a caucus with a regular meeting. They look alike because, typically, all seven Freeholders attend both meetings and review essentially the same information regarding resolutions before them. The key difference is that the resolutions are approved by a majority vote of the Freeholders only at the regular meeting, which generally occurs on the third Thursday of each month. The venue changes from month to month based on an annual schedule adopted by the Freeholder Board at its annual reorganization meeting in early January.

Since 1992, the Freeholders have conducted both a free-wheeling town meeting at 6:30 p.m., followed at 7:00 by the regular meeting, in various municipalities throughout Camden County, as a way of providing constituents with a convenient opportunity to engage their elected representatives in direct communication. Pre-meeting notices are distributed to every household in the host community. Moreover, a portion of every regular meeting is designated as a public forum, during which interested residents are encouraged to step up to the microphone and question or comment upon any item on the agenda. There is also a portion of the meeting set aside for constituents to speak out on any subject related to County government regardless of whether it is listed on the agenda.

Each Freeholder sponsors his or her own share of agenda items in accordance with the departmental oversight responsibilities assigned during the annual reorganization meeting in January. Individual Freeholders sponsor resolutions after consulting with the County Administrator or one of his deputies between regular monthly meetings.

We think of Camden County as the most open local government in New Jersey. Timing of the meetings (after normal work hours), web casting of the caucus, pre-meeting mailings, the website, and the town meetings, are only a few of the ways citizen participation is encouraged. Democracy is not just elections: it is a year round process of public administration with accountability to the voters. We hope you will take advantage of your rights with your presence and your voice.

Charter Schools Update - LWVNJ Workshops 2005

The plenary session that opened the fall LWVNJ workshops was an informative and interesting update on charter schools presented by Jennifer Langer, Executive Director of the NJ Charter Public Schools Association.

She began by making some points that she emphasized throughout the talk -- charter schools are *public* schools, subject to all the same statewide regulations as are other public schools, plus additional ones unique to them, such as annual reports to the state. They cannot discriminate, and must accept all applicants up to their limit, with an unbiased lottery to determine those accepted if the number of applicants exceeds the number of slots. Thus charter schools cannot turn away problem children or those with special needs (unlike private schools, which may have options in those areas). Some charter schools have been put on probation for failing to meet standards, and a few have been closed for that reason. The one way in which they have less accountability is at the local level, since they do not report to the local board of education.

Among the strengths of charter schools are their (1) greater “agility” (that is, their ability to respond to changes, move in new directions, etc.), (2) emphasis on innovation, (3) empowerment of students, families, and teachers, and (4) their accountability (at the state level). In theory regular public schools could do some of this, but so far they haven’t done as much, while charter schools do. Charter schools typically give more attention to individual students and have longer days (and longer school years) as well.

What is the impact on local school districts? She argued that while there is some fiscal impact, it is not as great as may be alleged. For each student enrolled, a charter school receives only 90% of the “Thorough and Efficient” amount determined for that district from the district’s funds. Since many districts spend much more than the T&E amount per pupil, they are paying less to have the child in the charter school than to have her or him in their own schools. Furthermore, special state money, notably that provided under the Abbott decision to help poor urban districts, doesn’t count in this formula, and is *not* given to the charter schools on a per-pupil basis. Charter schools do get some extra state money to make up the difference between the 90% T&A amount and what the district spends.

In its consensus position, the League did not “oppose” for-profit management of charter schools, but was concerned about it. In actuality, although there were some for-profit entities managing charter schools for a brief period, today there are none in New Jersey.

The possibility of “creaming” the students from the regular public schools is real and has been seen. The most active, interested, parents are sometimes the ones who go out of their way to place their children in charter schools. Thus, even without discrimination, the best students in the district may end up there. Jennifer argued that this outcome was less frequent today. More parents are aware of charter schools, and some schools (notably Emily-Fischer in Trenton) actively encourage young people in trouble to apply, thus shifting the mix to students who would not otherwise have been considered desirable.

What is needed to better support charter schools? Mainly changes in funding. In Abbott districts, many of the kids are difficult to educate, and charter schools are put at a disadvantage because they don’t receive a share of the Abbott funds. In the long run, we need a funding formula for the whole state that determines funding based on student characteristics (such as the number of special needs students), *not* based on where they live or what school they happen to attend. In addition, Charter Schools are not eligible for facilities funding, creating another hurdle for them to cross. Since some charter schools are renting space, this becomes doubly difficult to address.

Have charter schools “succeeded”? Unfortunately, there is little good research. What is needed is longitudinal research that follows individual young people and compares them to norms. If kids start out below the norms, do they catch up once they attend a charter school? This would be much more informative than reporting on the percentage of students who do or do not attain some milestone, as is often done. Certainly there has been innovation. There are charter schools that seek out troubled students. In time, we will know more about their impact. Ed G.