



Council of Metropolitan Area
Leagues

Established in 1962 as an ILO
and composed of the
members of local LWVs
of the seven metro counties
Anoka, Carver, Dakota,
Hennepin, Ramsey,
Scott and Washington

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Letter from the Chair

Greetings to All!

We had, as they say, a “high old time” on January 14 at the CMAL Quarterly Meeting on county government. County Commissioners Debbie Goettel from Hennepin County, Laurie Halverson from Dakota County and Trista MatasCastillo from Ramsey County put on a powerhouse display of knowledge about county policies and procedures – focusing, yes, on accountability, transparency, and civic engagement, but also veering into specific program areas as housing, juvenile services, law enforcement, mental health services, and resource recovery.

Metro Transit will be the focus of the CMAL March Quarterly on Saturday, March 18, where we will ask “**Is Metro Transit at a Crossroads?**” We will have speakers from Metro Transit to address crime, safety and ridership trends on the transit system.

On another Metro Transit issue, I was able to attend a webinar produced by Move Minneapolis on the national and local shortage of transit operators and mechanics. This shortage limits the scope of the services that Metro Transit can provide, irrespective of demand. The webinar featured research procured by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), gathered from over 200 transportation agencies across the U.S. Metro Transit officials described their current strategies for increasing hiring, training and retention of transit operators and mechanics. The webinar is “Hey, Where did My Bus Go?” and available on You Tube at: [Hey! Where Did My Bus Go? Bus Driver Shortages, A Tight Labor Market, & The Road Ahead - YouTube](#) I highly recommend this hour program.

CMAL Board members are looking forward to the 2023 Annual Meeting on May 20, 2023 and we are interested in what our membership would recommend as ideas for our 2023-2024 Program. Please let us know of any ideas you might have for programs, studies or briefing papers. Perhaps we should think about having County Commissioners on a more regular basis.

Warmly,

Karen

Karen Schaffer
CMAL Chair

Elect not Appoint the Met Council?

By: Carol Barclay

The Council of Metropolitan Leagues has supported the concept of an appointed council since the Met Council's creation. The 2019 CMAL Metropolitan Council Governance Update Study reiterated that an appointed Met Council is less parochial, less subject to special interests and better able to adopt and maintain positions for the good of the entire area. CMAL does not support the appointment of local elected officials to, or direct election of, members of the Metropolitan Council. [See full position in Program for Action, p 41. [CMAL Met Council Position](#)]

State Senator Scott Dibble, chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, stated in a recent interview on KSTP-TV that he plans to issue a bill that calls for electing, not appointing, members to the Metropolitan Council.

So far, no bill has been introduced to enact this change, but there may be one soon.

The Met Council is seen as a very powerful entity and legislators have over the years has been concerned about this power. The financial issues surrounding the Southwest Light Rail Project is again driving the call for more accountability and transparency.

Watch for more developments.

CMAL Program Schedule 2023-2024

Save the Dates

- March 18th Quarterly Meeting "Is the Metro Transit at a Crossroads"?
10:0 AM – 12:00 PM on Zoom
- May 20th Annual Meeting – More Info to Come
10 AM

Tribute to Susan Anderson

CMAL sadly reports the passing of former CMAL Board member Susan Anderson, on December 27, 2022.

Susan was a well-known local official in Anoka County, serving on the school board, Metropolitan Council, and the City of Ramsey. She was active in LWV Anoka, Blaine, Coon Rapids. She served on the CMAL Board from 2013-2020.

Having served as a member of the Metropolitan Council, she was highly active in the CMAL study on Metropolitan Governance. She was a kind and generous person. We will miss her.

Board Meeting Highlights

November - January

- Discussed possible speakers for the January 14, 2023 County Governance quarterly meeting.
- Agreed to pursue the topic of Transit for the March quarterly meeting and potential speakers.
- February newsletter will include summary of the Jan 14th quarterly meeting on County Government, information on the March quarterly meeting, Annual Meeting info such as director openings, solicit members' suggestions for a CMAL study or focus of programs, Chair's report and board meeting highlights.
- Board positions open for 2023-2035 terms are Board Chair, Secretary and two Director positions.
- One director's suggestion for a CMAL study in 2023-2024 is how cable companies work in different leagues' communities: some charge fees and some don't. What do cities do with the franchise fees?
- The board discussed the advantages and disadvantages of opting in under LWVMN's umbrella 501c3 status and its insurance policy.
- The LWV U.S. recognized CMAL in the 1960's as an inter-league organization (ILO) of LWVUS. CMAL wishes to maintain its current independence.

Summary of the Discussion with County Commissioners

By Marti Micks, Secretary

CMAL's January program highlighting County Government and the role of the County Commissioners was very informative and interesting, because of the depth of experience the commissioners have both in and outside of county government. This program highlighted commissioners from Hennepin, Ramsey and Dakota counties.

Laurie Halverson, Dakota County Commissioner, previously served eight years in the Legislature representing House district 51B. Her first job out of college was working for LWVMN, so she understands our nonpartisan advocacy.

As a County Commissioner, she enjoys hearing from the public on issues affecting their neighborhoods and understands that it's a big deal for them to come forward. She realizes that counties are most impactful when they are able to affect the housing and care that people receive and heartening to understand how the rules, regulations and policies that she helped enact during her time in the Legislature are being implemented by the county and are making a meaningful difference in people's lives.

She cited two such examples: Aspen House, a youth shelter for teens 12-17 years old, who cannot live in their homes and need a safe place to stay and a 16-bed mental crisis and recovery center that will open in 2025. The county engages with the Metropolitan Council, which has its opportunities and challenges in the process.

Trista MatasCastillo: Chair of Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, previously served 16 years in three branches of the military: Navy (enlisted), Marine Corps and National Guard (officer). She was usually the first and only woman to serve in each of her commands. Now she's on County Board with six women and one man.

She was motivated to run for county commissioner because county services impact people's everyday lives and she needed to find services for her son. She believes solutions come from the community: they know the problems and can identify solutions.

Advisory panels and community groups are valued and drive the policy and the work done by the Board. For this reason, Ramsey County gives stipends to its volunteers for their time. The county has streamlined the application process with one portal. A three-commissioner panel interviews the applicants to learn if applicants understand their role and are committed to serving.

Ramsey County has implemented performance-based budgeting and evaluates each department on their goals and objectives.

She feels the county is being transparent with the community. The county realizes there are major disparities that impact BIPOC lives; therefore, transforming the justice system, enhancing public safety and 911 response time, and child protection are top priorities.

Ramsey County has invested an extra \$16 million in public safety response to make sure there is a proper response when call comes in. An advisory council of 150 people representing each city in Ramsey County, plus police and EMS weighed in on the public safety response implementation grid which has an agreed-upon response for each type of 911 call now.

Debbie Goettel, Hennepin County Commissioner, previously served 10 years as Mayor of Richfield and noted It was a leap from a city of 36,000 to the 34th largest county in U.S. with 9,000 employees.

Hennepin County is very transparent with reports of how money was spent, but it's often hard to find these documents. She encourages the public to call or email her if they need help finding these reports. Many citizens do not feel comfortable contacting their commissioners, but she wants all to understand that contacting their commissioners leads to better understanding and change in the county system. She would like to hear from constituents on both controversial and noncontroversial issues. The County has a variety of newsletters, and she recommends signing up for them on the county website.

COVID and George Floyd's killing, compelled the county to change and has benefited from those changes. It now uses a disparities reduction lens in each of its strategies. Hennepin County reached out to diverse communities with people who look like them and were trusted and involved in their communities to learn what they need. This resulted in students having pods for tutoring, Seniors were taught how to use iPads for telehealth and others were taught de-escalation training.

Social workers and mental health professionals are now part of an intervention team embedded within the police departments and they may respond in lieu of police or with police depending on situation. There is also a 24/7 emergency response team with a 2-hour maximum response time. The county has also increased the participation of social workers and mental health professionals with the Fire Departments to assist with seniors at night.

Hennepin County has developed a Race Equity Advisory Council, (REAC) with the mission to strengthen the county's goal of disparity reduction and to advise the county board and county administration on the county's vision and strategy focused on reducing racial disparities and advancing racial equity throughout Hennepin County.

Hennepin County has adopted an ambitious Climate Action Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC: garbage burner waste to energy) is a big issue because it pollutes. It reduces landfill use, and pollution levels are well below federal acceptable levels. HERC will be decommissioned when better technology is found. The county also purchased an anaerobic digester to deal with compostable garbage.

Citizen Participation

Citizens sit on Budget, Audit and Capital Budget committees. The county wants a diverse board that represents the community. Interviews for these committees are public. There is always an open forum for budget hearings.

Commissioners applauded the CMAL County Government Study. They feel the counties get left out a lot, but are the social net for the entire county, with large budgets that have a significant impact on people's lives and local communities.

Q & A

1. Some counties have chosen to not broadcast the public comment portion. What is the practice in your county?

Hennepin: Does not broadcast public comment. Hennepin had open forum live streamed at county board and committee meetings during the pandemic but has returned to audio recordings because of problems with large groups gathering to be on camera and disrupt the meeting with false information. The Board takes comments on agenda and non-agenda items.

Ramsey: Does not have public comment portion, but they take public testimony at budget or ordinance hearings. Public meetings or forums have become stages to disrupt meetings especially counties in Greater Minnesota.

Dakota: Has time after gavel in to have public comment up to 5 minutes per person to address Board on an item not on the agenda. Meetings take place during the day and comments can come in via zoom or entered into record in writing. Last February, group wanted to call into question election process. Public comment went on for an hour. Public comment is audio recorded in Dakota, but the audio file is hard to find. She wants to make it more accessible to the public.

2. Do commissioners share emails with other commissioners?
When pertinent they will share with that commissioner or if it regards all county, they will share to the whole board. If letter sent to all the commissioners, they cannot respond to all as it goes against the open meeting laws.
3. Do county commissioners get together to brainstorm ideas to share with each other?
Yes. Commissioners represent their counties on various boards such as Health and Human Services and meet with commissioners from around the state.

There were more questions and answers. If you are interested in viewing the recording, [CMAL Metro County Commissioners Presentation Feb 2023](#).