



**League of Women Voters of Sussex County, Delaware
Annual Report to Sussex County Council
Sunshine Report Day 2018**

The League of Women Voters of Sussex County is a non-partisan political organization that encourages active participation in government through education and advocacy.

As part of our mission, we regularly attend and observe government meetings to insure that transparency in government and open meeting laws are followed. We also monitor government meetings to track the progress of issues that are of importance to the League, including voting, sustainable communities, social, fiscal and environmental issues. Each year we present a report to County Council, our “Sunshine Report”, that highlights our findings.

For the past nine years, the “Observer Corps” of the League has attended the meetings of Sussex County Council, Planning and Zoning and School Boards. Here are our findings for this past year:

1. Citizen Participation, Access and Right to Know

- The public comment period at the beginning of Council’s agenda and the enforcement of the three-minute public comment time limit worked well.
- Public hearings, even the largely attended ones, have been fair and opened to all views and comments. Perhaps some consideration, if legal, should be given to a time limit on public hearing comments so citizens and council members can hear all viewpoints in a reasonable amount of time.
- We are extremely grateful to Administrator Todd Lawson for offering County Council Chambers as an ideal venue for us to hold our ongoing public educational forums on issues related to the 2018 Comprehensive Plan and clean water. Clerk of the Council Robin Griffith and IT Support Specialist Amanda Hollis assisted us in laying the groundwork to ensure that our forums proceeded smoothly. Our focus continues to be public engagement with knowledgeable professionals with whom the citizens can interact on vital issues such as smart land use and the environment. We look forward to holding more forums in the year to come.
- The addition of security at County Council Chambers, a positive safety improvement, has not impeded public access. The new ordinance prohibiting firearms in county buildings, except for special use permits, is welcome.
- Under the direction of Sussex’s Director of Planning & Zoning, Janelle Cornwell, the County has made every effort to involve the public in the drafting of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan through its interactive website <https://sussexplan.com/> and in community meetings. This intent was reflected in both the lengthy deliberations of the Planning and Zoning Commission, and in the discussions subsequently held in County Council meetings.

2. Clarification in County Procedures, Policies and Ordinances

Over the past year, positive improvements have been made in the clarification and uniformity of county procedures, policies and ordinances. Examples are the additional commercial zoning classifications, rewriting of county ordinances, reapplication for conditional use amendments, clearer water and sewer regulations and fees, detailed signage ordinances and special events clarifications.

3. Land Use Decisions

- The League supports Council's consideration of consistency with surrounding fixed growth areas in the County's decisions on land use – specifically the decisions on Overbrook Town Center and the fitness center on Savannah Road.
- Council's suggestion that setbacks and other conditions in the health care developments along King's Highway be compatible with the Lewes Scenic and Historic Byway Plan is a welcome and crucial step in future planning.
- Recent land use decisions seem to be influenced by and consistent with the forward thinking of the new Comprehensive Plan under development.

4. 2018 Comprehensive Plan

- Since ordinances relevant to the 2018 Comp Plan are crucial to making the Plan a meaningful document, the League maintains a keen interest in seeing which ordinances are drafted and subsequently adopted. We agree with the concern Council has expressed that the drafting of these ordinances proceed without delay so that the concepts contained in this new Comp Plan will carry the Force of Law.

5. Concerns

- To protect the welfare of our citizens, the ongoing expansion of the poultry industry and the proximity to residential areas continues to need the attention of Council and Planning & Zoning.
- The issue of road connectivity between adjoining properties – both residential and commercial neighbors - is important for public safety. We support the commitment of the Planning & Zoning Commission to continue to enforce this policy.
- The council chambers audio and video system available on the county website is excellent. However, we continue to hear complaints about the clarity of sound within chambers.
- Affordable and available housing requires creative thinking and coordinated policy. As Council and the Comp Plan draft have recognized, there are many challenges facing this issue.
- We urge Council to keep the public informed on the progress of the Sussex Sports Center Foundation sports complex to assess the success of public/private partnerships.
- Agenda item descriptions have greatly improved in recent years. Public hearing items are fully described. However, when those items come up again under Old Business, much of the description is lost and not easily identifiable for the public.
- Planning & Zoning meetings have one only agenda available for attendees. It would be helpful if additional printed copies were available at the meetings.

In Conclusion

The Observer Corps of the Sussex County League of Women Voters appreciates this opportunity to present these findings to Council and we will continue our activities this year. We share with you the goal of continued open and good government for the citizens of Sussex County.

B.R. Breen

Observer Corps Coordinator, League of Women Voters of Sussex County