



**League of Women Voters of Sussex County, Delaware  
Annual Report To Sussex County Council  
Sunshine Report Day 2019**

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. Our focus centers on:

- Voter issues - providing information about local political and public school board candidates, voting rights, the election process and facilitating voter registration.
- Advocating for a strong approach to environmental protection and preservation of natural resources in Sussex County and
- Providing information and advocacy for the passage of ordinances to support the goals of the 2018 Sussex County Comprehensive Plan.

Over the past ten 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. Comprehensive Plan and Land Use**

- LWV applauds the Council’s recent approval of the ordinance removing senior facilities, such as nursing, assisted or independent living facilities, from the purview of the Board of Adjustment. This is especially significant due to the increase in this type of development around our County.
- Changes to Density Calculations and the Cluster Subdivision ordinances are welcome progress.
- The League encourages progress on these ordinance revisions for “Coastal Areas”, formerly “Environmentally Sensitive Areas”, as proposed in the Comprehensive Plan.
- The LWV Supports the work of the citizen organization SARG, the Sussex Alliance for Responsible Growth in regard to land use issues.
- We recommend that the County website could be used to monitor progress made on the Comprehensive Plan beyond ordinances that have been drafted or adopted. For example, commissions or committees established by the County to review and recommend policy, such as Affordable Housing or the Buffers and Wetland working group, could be noted.
- We applaud the County’s continued efforts to keep open communications with DeIDOT in an attempt to coordinate priorities and address problem areas. The timing of County Council decisions on development plans without completed DeIDOT traffic studies or their schedule is problematic and requires more updates from DeIDOT. P&Z has also rightly expressed their desire for more interaction with DeIDOT in order to make timely decisions.

## **2. Affordable Workforce Housing and the Homeless**

- We encourage progress on affordable housing improvements now that the consultant's report has been submitted to the County. While there was a successful project in Frankford, progress needs to be made in the eastern portion of the County where a large portion of the workforce is employed. We recognize this is a difficult balance with the constraints on high density housing and traffic concerns, and the lack of a successful formula for developers.
- The League encourages an accurate identification of the extent of the number of homeless in the County and supports the identification of remedies for our homeless population.

## **3. Citizen Participation, Access and Right to Know**

- During the Public Comment period of Council meetings, we request that all who speak be reminded to state their name and address. Some speakers make an incorrect assumption that we all know who they are. Stating an address also clarifies the difference between speakers who are residents of the County vs. those from outside Sussex County or the state.
- Better identification of speakers or presenters on the meeting agendas would be helpful. And during Council meetings, often it is unclear who is presenting before Council. Clearer identification at the beginning of a presentation in chambers would be a positive step.
- Agenda item listed under "Old Business" have little description. It would be helpful if more detailed descriptions were included.
- We wonder why recognized names of a development or community are not noted on agendas. For example, a recent public hearing on The Peninsula development was held. There was a lengthy description of the property, but it did not include the name "The Peninsula".
- We encourage that electronic presentations before Council be made available to citizens. League members have had success requesting electronic presentation copies from County staff, with the added benefit that they can be shared with those unable to attend a Council meeting. When possible, we encourage electronic presentations made by others to Council be added to the County's website.
- Public Hearings - Right vs. Privilege: In the past year, several citizens have thanked Council for the "privilege" of speaking at hearings. The League would like to point out that this is a "right" for County residents.
- The LWV will continue to monitor and report on the party affiliation rules of the County's government bodies with special attention to opportune party-affiliation switching.
- The League is concerned about the policies and inconsistencies of the Board of Adjustment and encourages open and fair operation of this government body. We suggest Council may want to consider staggered terms.

## **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 government for the citizens of Sussex County.

*B.R. Breen*

*Observer Corps Coordinator, League of Women Voters of Sussex County  
Presented September 24, 2019*