

WHAT'S COMING UP IN 2017-2018?

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) is off to a running start for 2017-2018. This year promises to be an active one with committees presenting results from studies, primary and general elections in 2018 and Trending Topics (see list at end). October 16 is our Fall Luncheon, featuring Lily Qi, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer for Montgomery County. Our annual program planning meetings are held in January. In addition, many of us attend Montgomery County Council and MD legislative committee meetings. Join in the discussions by attending and participating in one or more of our Discussion Groups (DGs). Learn about what the committees and other members are doing.

All are welcome!!

A few highlights from each of our resource committees follow. Please contact the chairs about times for meetings. Chris Hager, First Vice President for Program, invited board members to highlight a few key issues for their committees. What two reasons or two new ideas may members, visitors and friends want to know about the topic? If you are interested in any of these issues, join a committee (all are welcome!!) or attend a DG and/or a Trending Topic.

Agriculture (Margaret Chasson, chair)

Food insecurity in Montgomery County will be a major focus of the Agriculture Study Committee this year. Food insecurity is the state of being without consistent, reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Lack of access to healthful, nourishing food undermines the health and wellbeing of children and families. The current estimate is that 7% of county residents (77,780 individuals) are food insecure.

An inventory showing all of the programs that receive government funding to address food insecurity in the county indicated that the county lacked a strategic plan to assist in consolidating the existing efforts in our county and to follow as the county seeks to address and ultimately eliminate its food insecurity. While much besides food production is involved with generating food security, local agriculture plays a role. The committee will look into the various aspects of the strategic plan that has been developed, emphasizing the role of local agricultural programs, but also considering other aspects of the big picture.

Economic Development (Margaret Chasson, chair)

Since major responsibility for the economic development of the county has been assigned to a public/private partnership, the Economic Development Study Committee has been looking into the manner in which responsibilities have been parceled out and how the strategic plan suggested by the county is being implemented. Some portions of the responsibilities previously under the Economic Development Department of the county have remained with the county, but others are under the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation and Worksource Montgomery, Inc., a non-profit organization.

The range of activities is wide and includes business attraction and retention, as well as encouragement of entrepreneurship and small business outreach from the Economic Development Corporation. Talent attraction, retention and development are the focus of Worksource Montgomery. The county has retained major responsibility through new assignments for finance, agricultural services and special

projects. Our study involves understanding what the activities are that lead to the goals of the county and how the various components of the economic development program work together. One example of talent development is a program for high school students, discussed July 28 in the Washington Post.

Education Committee (Maxine Lewack, chair)

Montgomery County prides itself on maintaining high standards for the education of the youngest citizens. How is it possible that there are a large number of children who are unprepared to begin kindergarten? How can the League make a difference? Other questions of interest to the committee are: Why are so many registered voters alienated from the government on all levels? Could it be that we are not teaching civics effectively? Do we need an approach that is more “practical” than “theoretical”?

Health and Human Services (Chris Hager and Eva Feder, co-chairs)

Every day or so we hear about the use and abuse of substances such as marijuana, heroin and other opioids. What is happening in Montgomery County? What are the statistics for use and abuse by age, gender and racial/ethnic group? Are there enough resources in our county to treat people, including adolescents and children, with substance abuse problems? What drugs are being used and by which population groups? What is the state and county doing about marijuana, specifically? We will be exploring these issues and collecting and synthesizing the information to prepare a report. We meet every month or two to discuss the status of our report and to raise other questions related to health and human services in our county.

Housing (Melpi Jeffries and Sally Roman, co-chairs)

Housing committee members are hard at work developing a report for presentation at discussion groups this year on rental housing and renters.

International Relations (Judy Whiton, chair)

European Populism—what’s in a name? You may have heard about the rise of populism in the media in the last several years. Is populism a belief, a movement, a political strategy? We have been exploring the populist movement in Europe. Join us as we continue to examine European and US populist parties, their leaders and their platforms with a view to understanding whether they are a positive force for democracy and how their rise might affect European-US relations.

Land Use and Transportation (Bee Ditzler, chair)

Many concerns affect both land use and transportation. These two issues are entwined. LWVMC follows county issues and weighs in on what’s happening to land use and transportation. We have many questions about land use and transportation! Do you believe everyone in Montgomery County knows and loves our land use and transportation? How are empty properties developed? How do we track county zoning issues? How are farm lands preserved and business areas developed? How do we ensure that traffic flows smoothly? Are bus stops within walking distance? How does transportation affect the environment? Does everyone think funding for transportation is easy?

What’s on the horizon for changes in transportation? We have many questions about transportation -- here are a few: When will the cars move? Why isn’t Metro running smoothly? When will the next bus come? Where are the bike trails? How can I put a bike on a bus or Metro? Why can’t I walk safely on sidewalks and cross streets? What are the trade-offs for driving, transit, biking, walking? What is Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)? When will we see it -- the first route will be Route 29; then Route

355/Rockville Pike and Veirs Mill Road. Corridor Cities Transit (CCT) is on hold. New routes for RideOn buses include Route 355 express bus from Clarksburg. What is the “Fund It–Fix It” coalition, of which we are part, doing about Metro?

Other questions haunt us: How can we make it safe to walk so fewer people are hit, injured or killed? Is a new Potomac bridge being built? Will there be dedicated bike lanes? What is the Transportation Planning Board for DC, VA, MD doing? Is there a new master plan for highways? Are I-270 exit changes being discussed? So many land use and transportation questions and so few clear answers! We try to follow all the issues, and we do testify.

Making Democracy Work (Mary Lanigan, chair)

Voting rights, voter suppression and keeping the voter rolls up to date have been in the news lately. There is a presidential commission studying voter fraud. Judicial Watch has sued Montgomery County and the State of Maryland in the belief that there are people on the voter rolls who should not be. These issues have long been studied by the League and rarely receive much attention, but suddenly they are topic number one. LWVMC is continuing to do what we have for years — educating ourselves and the public about the election process and good government.

Making Democracy Work (MDW) focuses on the election process. Our goal for 2017/2018 is to energize citizens to vote in the June 2018 Primary Election and November 2018 General Election by registering voters, informing voters of candidates and their positions via the Voters’ Guide and working to increase voter turnout. Some of our questions are: What really happens behind the scenes at the county and state levels to ensure a fair election? An upcoming trending topic will include panelists from the Montgomery County and Maryland State Boards of Elections who will outline the process followed by a question-and-answer period.

October DGs will explore the primary election process. The findings of a two-year study conducted by the our state league (LWV of Maryland) will be presented along with questions designed to form a policy position for use in letting our elected leaders know what the League recommends. DGs will outline the different ways of conducting a primary election (closed, open, top two, etc.), ways of determining the winner (requiring a majority (50% or more) or just a plurality [highest percentage] of the votes) and of engaging the increasing number of unaffiliated voters?

How can young people be encouraged to vote? A subgroup of MDW has established a College Outreach Initiative with Montgomery College and may expand to work with the University of Maryland. The team intends to make classroom presentations to political science and government classes on what the League does and offer student service learning projects to earn extra credit. Three service projects have been identified: (1) Observer Corps—Attend Montgomery County Council meetings and prepare a written report; (2) Help with Voter Registration of new citizens after naturalization ceremonies; and (3) Assist LWVMC with the County 101 study by developing graphics on the Montgomery County government structure, formatting the Fact Sheet, and providing publicity for the study.

Natural Resources (Linda Silversmith, chair)

Our slogan has long been “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.” What’s left to consider? What should we do about solid waste and food waste, specifically? How does Montgomery County handle solid waste? What do we know and/or need to learn about food waste? What is the Department of Environmental Protection doing about food waste? The committee is preparing a report for the Spring.

County101 (Catherine Barnes, chair)

The County 101 study group is new and open to participants! They met for the first time in August to begin outlining the scope and approach of the study. Here are a few questions to consider: What would you like to know about how your county government operates? What do you think should be the focus of the study? What questions should the study attempt to answer?

Tentative Trending Topics:

Behind the scenes of voting in Montgomery County (security, registration, observation)

Fake news

Childhood education, including special needs or preparing everyone for work

Food security

Metro funding

How the county handles solid waste

Questions for September DGs:

- 1. What issues are most important to you? What do you want to know more about in the coming year?**
- 2. What issues are we missing?**
- 3. How can the LWVMC be more active—learning, attending hearings, writing letters?**