

The Voter

of the Pensacola Bay Area

Volume 59 Issue 4 November 2009



ESCAMBIA COUNTY CONSOLIDATION STUDY COMMISSION

Janet Lander, a member of the Escambia County Consolidation Study Commission (ECCSC), will provide a report of the progress of the commission. Ms. Lander served as an Escambia County Attorney for six years and, in that

position, was involved in every significant land use and local governmental issue in the County. She had previously served for eight years as Deputy County Attorney. Ms. Lander has represented both municipal and county governments for over twenty years and is currently in private practice in Pensacola.

delegation no later than January 15, 2010.

The legislation further provided that Special Statutory Advisory Committees would be appointed to provide advice and counsel in the areas of Public Safety, Economic Development and Health Care.

The full commission was to be composed of 25 members, appointed by following entities:

Member

Kenneth Bell, Esq.- Chair
Dr. Rick Harper- Vice Chair
C.J. Lewis- Secretary
Enoch Leatherwood-Treas.
Richard Stone-Parliamentarian
John Peacock
Edward Fleming, Esq.
Gerald McKenzie, Esq.
Rick Finch
Rusty Tanner
Charles Scott, Jr.
Clarry Ellis
Jeremy Brown
Sharon Barnett, Esq.
John Gormley
Rev. LuTimothy May
Jimmy Cunningham
Stephen Moorhead, Esq.
Gary Montee
Doris Harris
Janet Lander, Esq.
Tim Common
Norm Ross
Dr. John Veasley
Michael Hardin

Appointed by

Chief Judge Skievaski
Univ. of West Florida
Pensacola City Council
Property Appraiser Chris Jones
Tax Collector Janet Holley
Commissioner Dist. 1
Commissioner Dist. 2
Commissioner Dist. 3
Commissioner Dist. 4
Commissioner Dist. 5
Century Mayor/Council
Pensacola City Council
Escambia Taxpayers' Assn.
League of Women Voters
Pensacola Young Professionals
Ministerial Alliance
Escambia County Farm Bureau
Homebuilders Assn. of WF
Sheriff David Morgan
Clerk of Court Ernie Magaha
Chief Judge Skievaski
ECUA
Escambia County School Board
NAACP
Supervisor of Elections David Stafford

Consolidation Process

Saturday November 21, 2009

9:00 am coffee, 9:30 am program

Speaker: Janet Lander, ECCSC member
First Presbyterian Noonan Center

CONSOLIDATION COMMISSION

On May 5, 2009 the Florida Governor approved a bill which created the Escambia County Consolidation Study Commission to examine the pros and cons of a Unified Government. It also provided opt-out provisions for both the City of Pensacola and the Town of Century.

“The commission shall compile and present by November 30, 2009, a status report on the progress and tentative finding. Such status report shall be presented to the board (Escambia County Commission), the City of Pensacola, Town of Century and the legislative delegation”. A proposed consolidation plan is to be submitted to the legislative

The Commission set up the following subcommittees: Administrative Services; Drafting; Economic Development & Forecasting; Planning & Permitting; Proposal Ranking; Public Safety & Council Composition; Roads, Recreation, Utilities, Special Districts & Authorities.

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President's Message

During the consensus meeting on the City of Pensacola Charter, League members were unable to reach consensus on the proposed document. The new

Charter, if passed, would change Pensacola government from a Council-Manager format to a “strong mayor” structure.

League board member Sharon Barnett, who has monitored the Charter process from its inception, presented a summation of the review process and a point by point analysis of the proposed changes. Dr. Bill Haraway, the Charter Commission’s former academic consultant, offered insight into the review process itself. Although he stated initially that he did not support or oppose the proposed Charter’s government changes, Dr. Haraway questioned the road by which they were reached. He had concerns about whether the Charter Commission had followed correctly the directives from the Pensacola City Council when the Commission was appointed.

A lively discussion of the Charter’s pros and cons followed. It produced both agreement and disagreement as members hashed out the implications of proposed changes to Pensacola’s government structure. Members largely agreed the proposed Charter contains adequate professional requirement provisions for City Administrator and Department Heads. There was also consensus that residency requirements would present too many obstacles to finding qualified City employees.

Members did not agree, however, on whether the proposed 9 member City Council, with 7 single member districts and 2 at large seats is the best way to balance power between Council and Executive branches. Some felt the arrangement would result in a powerful mayor and a comparatively diluted City Council. Others felt that the charter meets the League’s position on balance of power and it was pointed out that the charter has a mandatory review every ten years in which a problem on this issue could be addressed – or a review can occur sooner than ten years.

Disagreement also centered on the proposed referendum provision. Of course, this is the issue that

started the whole Charter review process at the outset. League concerns with the Maritime Park referendum raised an initial red flag about flaws in Pensacola’s referendum process and spurred the City Council to appoint a charter commission.

After reviewing the Commission’s final referendum recommendations, some members were concerned about a change that would prevent citizens from challenging budget, salary and taxing issues. Others felt those issues are best left to policymakers, whom citizens can vote out if they are dissatisfied with performance. Members were also concerned about a reduction of petition signature requirements and a possibility of delaying policy implementation for about four months to accommodate suggested referendum deadlines. In the end, the League could not reach consensus on the issue.

Several members argued that Charter reform is long overdue; others countered the proposed document contains too many concerns and perhaps should have been postponed until questions of Consolidation are resolved.

Our final lack of consensus reflects wider disagreements within the City community, itself. But it also reflects the League’s careful, measured approach towards taking a position on any given issue.

We can be proud of the fact that voters look to the League for unbiased information, and it is vital that we build a solid case among our own members before advocating for or against any given issue. Even though we did not reach consensus, we continue with our primary mission to provide information to a wide range of voters. In that way we help voters who will ultimately determine the question for themselves and go to the polls informed on the charter proposal; we will certainly continue to carry out that role as the Charter vote draws to a close. Our sincere gratitude goes out to all the volunteers who are working so hard to ensure that the League remains the key community resource our founders envisioned.

Deborah, 449-1746

Thank You!

This issue of **The Voter** has been
underwritten by
Bette and Edward Boddy.

Environmental Share Information at Natural Resources Committee

Mary Gutierrez, 549-7472

On Tuesday, November 20th the Pensacola Bay Area League of Women Voters Natural Resources Committee held a meeting that brought together numerous community based organizations and groups that serve the needs of Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties.

Some of the groups are volunteer based organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, Bayou Chico Association and Save Our Shores, while others such as the Nature Conservancy, Escambia County Landfill and the Coastkeepers have paid positions. Each group representative was given approximately 5 minutes to discuss what their organization does and how they serve the community.

Blair Stephenson, President of the Bayou Texar Foundation, stated that the 35 year old organization's main focus at the present is stormwater pollution that is affecting Bayou Texar and the Escambia Company Treating Site groundwater plume that is migrating toward the Bayou.

Ms. Stephenson also stated that the Foundation had worked with the City and the Bay Area Resource Council to purchase stormwater drainage systems that alleviate debris, oil and grease and other pollutants from entering the Bayou. They will continue to educate the public about stormwater pollution.

The Bayou Chico Association was represented by John Naybor, who said their organization has been in existence for 30 years and comprises both businesses and residents along the Bayou. Their concern is the entire watershed for the basin, dealing with shoreline erosion, and water quality issues within the Bayou. Mr. Naybor stated that a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation plan is ongoing and that the Association is involved in this process.

Other groups represented at the event included Gulf Coast Environmental Defense, Earth Day Pensacola, Citizens Against Toxic Exposure, the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, Sustainable West Florida, Friends of Perdido Bay, Saufley Landfill, Perdido Key Association, and the Navarre-Holley Action Group.

The groups' representatives were able to network and discuss how each organization could assist helping each other achieve their missions. The overall premise of the meeting was to prevent a duplication of efforts among the organizations and provide a united front to improve the environment in which we live and play.



Calendar

November

- 3 Tuesday, 5:30 pm **Board Meeting** at new Tryon Branch Public Library, 1200 Langley Avenue. Members are welcome.
- 17 Tuesday, 10 am **International Relations Committee**, Azalea Trace in the auditorium, Admiral Skip Furlong will lead the Great Decisions discussion on *The Arctic Age*. Contact Gene Fecht at 479-3352 for information.
- 17 Tuesday, 5:30 pm **Natural Resources Committee**, Caldwell & Associates at 116 North Tarragona Street. Contact Mary Gutierrez,

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- 24 Tuesday, 7:00 pm is the **deadline to return completed City of Pensacola Mail ballot** to the Elections Office by return mail or delivered directly to the Elections Office at 213 Palafox Place, 2nd floor.

December

- 1 Tuesday, 5:30 pm **Board Meeting** at new Tryon Branch Public Library, 1200 Langley Avenue. Members are welcome.
- 6 Sunday, 2:30 - 4:30 pm, **Celebrate the Holidays with John and Janet deLorge, 2928 Sundance Lane, Cantonment, FL** See invitation for details.

The Social Policy committee is planning a forum in collaboration with the Center for Applied Psychology at the University of West Florida. The topic will be *Domestic Violence: Prevention, Detection and Transitions*. The level will be academic and professional education. The date will be late January. League members will be invited to attend.

Join the League of Women voters today!

It's easy! Just send your check to:

League of Women Voters, P O Box 2023, Pensacola FL, 32513
\$50 Individual membership ● + \$25 each additional household member ●
\$25 student membership
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Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____
Email Address _____

The VOTER

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LWV is a non-partisan political organization that encourages citizens to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Any person of voting age, male or female, may become a member.

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LEAGUE BACKGROUND ON CONSOLIDATION

The League undertook an in-depth study on consolidation of city and county governments in Escambia County in 1968-69, when proponents initiated a campaign to change local government. Following that study, the local League developed the Yardstick for Good Local Government. Based on those criteria, the League supported the consolidation proposal on the ballot on November 3, 1970, but the issue was defeated. (Refer to the February, 2009 local Voter article on consolidation.)

Escambia County Consolidation Study Commission's website at www.eccsc.org, includes a number of scholarly articles. Another source of information is Escambia All for One, www.EscambiaAllForOne.com, whose stated goal is "to bring together the diverse elements of our community to research all alternatives"

Yardstick for Good Local Government

(Position established in 1969.)

- 1. representative policy-making body of widely proportions elected by voters with home rule powers;
2. single administrative head or manager chosen by commission (council) and accountable to it to effectively administer county services and implement policy;
3. choice of professional department heads by the administrator;
4. flexibility in administrative structure to allow adjustment to changing local needs and conditions;
5. modern procedures for fiscal and personnel management and for planning;
6. public services of acceptable quality at reasonable cost, and without overlapping or duplication of services;
7. adequate and equitable revenue sources with service taxes in proportion to services required;
8. authority to cooperate with other governments and non-governmental agencies;
9. unified system of courts;
10. merit system for civil service.

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