**Annual Report of the Budget & Structure Interest Group**

**of the League of Women Voters of Cook County**

**May 2021 – April 2022**

The members of the Budget & Structure Interest Group (“B&S”) continue to observe, research, learn, act, and make a positive difference with regard to both the Cook County and Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (“MWRD”) governments.

This report covers only some of the highlights of the work B&S did with regard to Cook County government. There is a separate report on what we did at the MWRD. This report is organized by the Proposed Areas of Focus that were part of the Program that was approved the delegates at the May 2021 Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Cook County.

**County and MWRD government organization and oversight, including ethics and compliance with the Shakman decision principles; transparency and effectiveness of board operations. (Focus Areas 1 and 2)**

* **Salaries of County Elected Officials:** A recent study of salaries of comparable officials in other counties found that most of the salaries of the Cook County officials were below the median. The Board of Commissioners is considering a proposal to raise salaries, but the proposal currently does not include the new dollar amounts. B&S is looking at what steps the League should take to assure there is sufficient time for the public to review and comment before any changes are made.
* **Inspector General (“IG”):**
  + B&S reviews the quarterly reports posted by the IG to determine whether any action by the League should be taken.
  + A recent report included the IG’s findings of conflict of interest, waste, and institutional mismanagement by the Board of Trustees of the South Cook County Mosquito Abatement District. B&S alerted the local Leagues whose areas are within that district and offered to work with them should they wish to pursue the issue.
* **Ethics Board:** B&S is following the actions being taken by this Board, including the recent finding that Board of Review Commissioner Tammy Wendt has violated the County’s Ethics Ordinance by hiring a relative on her staff.
* **Shakman Oversight Cases:** B&S reviews the periodic reports filed by the Federal Court-appointed Administrators in the 3 current cases in the offices of the Assessor, Clerk, and Clerk of the Court.
* **Redistricting:** B&S prepared comments for the League to submit opposing the process of Commissioners’ drawing their own maps, to no avail. Final maps were approved in September, 2021.

**Observing/reporting and assessing budget processes (Focus Area 3)**

* **Use of American Rescue Plan Act (“ARPA”) and Equity Special Purpose Fund monies:**
  + The County is receiving $1 Billion from the Federal Government in ARPA funds. $420 Million has been approved to be spent in 2021 and 2022, with the remainder to be spent in 2023 and 2024.
  + The County is using its revenues to fund the Equity Special Purpose Fund, with $54 Million to be spent in 2022 for programs to help level the playing field for communities that have been disadvantaged.
  + B&S is following the process for approving the use of both these funds and has prepared comments which the League filed urging that the County identify up front the expected outcomes, along with ways to measure whether such outcomes have been achieved.

**Follow-up on applicable LWVCC positions and past studies (e.g., performance management and the results of the Recorder/Clerk December 2020 merger) (Focus Area 4)**

* B&S used the League’s performance management position as the basis for the comments on ARPA and the Equity Funds (see above).
* B&S will continue to periodically review the County’s performance management program and monitor whether the expected benefits from the Recorder/Clerk merger are being realized. However, these will no longer be an area of focus.

Members of the B&S Group: Carolyn Cosentino, Diane Edmundson, Kathi Graffam, Betty Hayford, Karin Hribar, Amy Little, Nancy Marcus, Priscilla Mims, and Cynthia Schilsky