

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BUDGET & STRUCTURE INTEREST GROUP: May, 2020 -- April, 2021

Areas of Focus for 2020-21 (approved at May 2020 Annual Meeting):

1. Cook County and Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) government organization and oversight, including ethics
2. Transparency of board operations
3. Observing/reporting and assessing budget processes
4. Follow-up on applicable LWVCC positions and past studies (e.g., performance management and Recorder/Clerk December 2020 merger)

As detailed below, Budget and Structure has been very active and has accomplished much in all these areas of focus during this past year. We continue to build on what we have learned and what we have done in past years, and expect to continue to make a positive difference. PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING US!

Activities/Accomplishments of Budget & Structure related to Cook County

Government (Note: activities/accomplishments related to the MWRD may be found in a separate report)

Organization, oversight (including ethics) & transparency (covering Areas of Focus 1 and 2)

- **Redistricting:** Three members are taking the lead in following and commenting on the process for drawing the districts for the 17 Commissioners. It appears that Commissioners will be following similar process to last time: including creating a Board Redistricting Committee with the same chair (Deborah Sims) and hiring the same consultants to draw the maps. The County has a more transparent process than the State or City of Chicago, but that bar is low. League recently filed written statement urging use of independent commission, allowing time for public input before and after a proposed map is presented, and transparency of data. Because Census data will likely not be available until Sept., which is after time when candidate petitions can start to be circulated for March 2022 primary, expect Committee may use other data.
- **Shakman Oversight Cases:** Continued to review the public reports to the Federal Court from the Court-Appointed Administrators over the Assessor's, Clerk of the Court's, and County Clerk's offices. With the Clerk's assumption of duties of the Recorder, not sure where that case stands. Have seen significant progress reported in the Assessor's office.
- **Inspector General ("IG"):**
 - IG Patrick Blanchard re-appointed for 2-year term to Oct. 2022 (when he expects to retire).
 - Quarterly Reports: Continued to review these reports for possible follow-up. Advocated successfully for ordinance to be changed to require reports to be formally submitted as agenda items for Board meetings. This allows the public, including the League, to comment.
 - Board of Review ("BoR"): IG did investigation into allegations that politics involved in hiring/firing, etc. of employees, and employees being asked to do political activities. The IG made recommendations for changes to BoR practices and policies. League urged BoR to fully adopt recommendations. IG reported that BoR failed to respond to recommendations, and League advocated that County Board take steps to encourage adoption by BoR. As of April, IG and BoR still in discussion on 2 recommendations, following meetings of the applicable Board Committee.
- **Ethics Board and Dept. of Human Rights & Ethics:** Have observed a few meetings of the Board and expect to delve into learning more about Board and Department in the coming year. Expecting an Amendment to the County's Ethics Ordinance soon and will review.
- Reviewed Board and Committee agendas throughout the year for **items of interest** to League; communicated these to Observer Chair to assist Observers, as well as to other

Interest Groups when applicable; advised whether the League should take action; and followed status of items. Example: recently successfully advocated for deletion of a proposal to allow “subject matter reports” from County departments/officials to be submitted directly to the applicable Committee, rather than first being submitted to the Board and then referred to Committee. This proposal would have meant the public would have only a few days’ notice of the report, reducing transparency and likely eliminating the opportunity for the public to comment.

Budget process and transparency (covering Area of Focus 3)

- Because of past years of League activity, County includes League in preview meetings for the Preliminary Budget and the Proposed Budget along with such groups as the Civic Federation.
- Observed the Mid-year budget meetings and the 2021 budget meetings with departments held by the Board’s Finance Committee. All observer reports published on the League’s web site.
- Sent a letter suggesting some areas to consider for cost-savings prior to finalization of proposed budget.
- Following approval of the final budget, sent a letter to the Finance Committee Chair, the Budget Director and the Chief Financial Officer providing some suggestions for improving the process and online budget books. Received a detailed response from the CFO.

Follow-up on past studies (covering Area of Focus 4)

- **Clerk’s assumption of the Recorder of Deeds’ duties** did take place in Dec. 2020.
 - Reviewed the Final Recommended Plan by the committees working on this and provided questions, most of which were asked by Commissioners in a review meeting in July, and to which the Clerk’s office responded.
 - In October, reviewed the Final Plan along with the Clerk’s proposed 2021 budget and submitted observations and questions to the Finance Committee, which asked for responses from the Clerk. Again, the Clerk’s office responded fully.
 - Will continue to monitor the effects of this assumption, which will be made easier if the Board approves a proposal from Commissioner Suffredin to have quarterly reports. Among other issues identified are recordings not being done promptly, which started prior to the assumption last year.
- **Performance Management:** A third iteration of performance management by the Offices under the President has been implemented, starting last year.
 - Reviewed the web site (<https://performance.cookcountyil.gov/>) which details – for the offices under the President only at this time – the department goals, measures related to achieving those goals, the targets of achievement, and the actual performance data. Provided a report containing observations and recommendations for improvement to the Department responsible for overseeing the program. Met and discussed this in detail recently with that Department.
 - Have been told that expect that the Forest Preserve District and the Assessor’s Office, along with possibly two other separately elected official’s offices, will be adopting this form of performance management and reporting starting this year. We’ll be watching.