

**Annual Report of the Budget & Structure Interest Group  
of the League of Women Voters of Cook County  
2025-26**

***We study, learn, monitor, and take action to make Cook County and MWRD Governments more efficient, effective, and transparent***

**Cook County matters**

This report covers the highlights of the work the Budget & Structure Interest Group (“B&S”) did regarding Cook County government in carrying out the Program for B&S approved at last year’s Annual Meeting. *There is a separate report on what was done regarding the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.*

Up for election this year are the positions for all 17 Cook County Commissioners, the President, Assessor, Board of Review members for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Districts, Clerk, Sheriff, and Treasurer. B&S prepared the questions for candidates for these offices for VOTE411.org, and has reviewed the candidates’ responses for ideas to follow-up on, as well as to learn more about present and future officials’ interests.

As a result of the Primary, we know there will be at least 6 new Board members, a new Assessor, and a new Board of Review member after the November 2026 election. The largest turnover since 2018.

**What B&S did to carry out the 2025-26 Program approved at the May 2025 Annual Meeting regarding Cook County:**

The following is the approved program that relates to Cook County. Note that key to the work of B&S is the information from the Observer Reports that the Observer Corps prepares. Many of the B&S members are also Observers.

***Continue to learn about, monitor, examine, and take action when appropriate regarding Cook County government, focusing on***

***a. Transparency and effectiveness of Board operations***

1. Separate Consent Agenda Meetings: Last year B&S reported that, at the urging of the League, the Cook County Board moved the Consent Agenda (those items honoring people and events) to a separate meeting that was to start at 9 am and last no later than 60 minutes so the regular business meeting could start on time at 10 am. B&S monitored what actually occurred and saw that the Consent Agenda meeting was starting late and generally lasting 90 minutes or more. B&S therefore advocated with Commissioners for more changes so the regular business meeting would not be delayed. The Cook County Board modified its procedures to have the business meeting start at 9 am, with the Consent Agenda meeting starting at 11 am, effective January 2026. With one notable exception, as a result of an unusually long public comment period, both meetings have generally started on time
2. Meetings with Commissioners: Key to being effective in making changes is to have good working relationships with the Commissioners, which includes meeting with them to learn their views and priorities. This past year B&S met with Commissioners Stamps (1<sup>st</sup>), Scott (2<sup>nd</sup>), McCaskill (5<sup>th</sup>), and Vasquez (8<sup>th</sup>).
3. Board of Review: B&S continued to attend the quarterly meetings of the Board of Review to follow their organization and get to know key people.

***b. Boards' oversight of spending and programs, including use of appropriate performance objectives and measures***

1. B&S attended meetings for civic organizations held by the Cook County Bureau of Finance for both the summer Preliminary Budget and the October Proposed 2026 Budget.
2. B&S observed and filed reports posted on the League web site for both the Preliminary and 2026 Budget review meetings.
3. The League has a position regarding performance management. B&S, as it has in the past, reviewed the County's Annual Performance Management Report and met with the Department in charge. B&S urged that "workload" measures be distinguished from true "performance" measures and that the latter also relate to the "opportunities" identified by each department. B&S also encouraged that Department to reach out to the Commissioners for support and information as to what should be measured. B&S has noticed that more Commissioners are asking about performance measures when asked to fund or continue funding programs, which B&S urges when meeting with the Commissioners.
4. B&S supported the County's study of the mosquito abatement activities in Cook County with recommendations for improvements due June 1, 2026. There are currently 4 separate districts, with some activities also performed by other entities. B&S made suggestions as to what should be considered in doing the assessment and urged that whatever the final outcome, greater transparency and accountability be the result.

***c. Inspector General and Auditor reports and follow-up***

1. B&S continues to review the quarterly reports from the Inspector General (IG) office that are posted on the County web site and review what occurs at the Board's Litigation Committee meetings when IG Paxton appears in connection with those reports. B&S recommended that IG Paxton provide a verbal summary at the meetings. B&S has noticed a marked increase in the number of questions from Commissioners as a result. (Previously, there was often no discussion.) B&S recently followed-up on a report which identified that only some of the separately-elected offices have "ineligible to hire" lists for prior employees whom the IG has found to have violated some of the more serious County rules.
2. The IG has proposed that the County enact a budget floor for the office in order to increase both the perception and reality of the office being independent. B&S talked with the IG and several Commissioners to determine whether the League should take any action. The decision was to not take a position at this time.
3. B&S also reviews the Observer Reports on the Board's Audit Committee to which the County Auditor's reports are referred, but has determined that this should not continue to be a focus in 2026-27 as B&S has not identified any follow-up it should or can take.

**Members of the B&S Group during 2025-26:** Susan Avila (Chicago), Hollis Burgess (Chicago), Victoria Cerinich (Palos-Orland), Carolyn Cosentino (Homewood-Flossmoor), Laura Davis (Palatine, Barrington, & Schaumburg), Diane Edmundson (Chicago), Kathi Graffam (LaGrange), Sue Gregory (Glenview/Glencoe), Betty Hayford (Evanston), Susan Kern (Palatine, Barrington, Schaumburg), Pris Mims (Chicago), Cynthia Schilsky (LaGrange), & Deborah Stone (Chicago)

**Join this Group that Is Effective and Respected!**  
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