

The Saga of the League's Budget & Structure Group and the Elimination of the Elected Cook County Recorder of Deeds Office

League members have always known that we can't let set-backs or what appear to be defeats get us down. We just work even harder. It took supporters of a woman's right to vote in the U.S. 72 years from Seneca Falls in 1848 to the addition of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in August 1920. It took 9 years for the elimination of the elected position of the Cook County Recorder of Deeds and the transfer of that office's duties to the Cook County Clerk which took place in December 2020. And the League of Women Voters of Cook County ("LWVCC") was involved all along the way.

The LWVCC supported the November 2016 referendum which proposed the transfer of the duties to the Clerk based on a report by the LWVCC's Budget & Structure Group which found, among other things, that the elimination of the separate Recorder's office should save the County at least \$1 million annually. In the Final Plan for the transfer submitted by the Clerk and Recorder in September, 2020, there is an estimate of over \$1 million in savings for 2021 and \$6.7 million over the next 3 years.

Here's a recap of the journey from 2011 to 2020:

- Fall of 2011: Cook County Commissioner John Fritchey proposes a resolution to place a referendum on the November 2012 ballot to eliminate the Recorder of Deeds Office and transfer the duties to the County Clerk.
- Feb., 2012: The Board of the LWVCC approves a proposal by the League's Budget & Structure Interest Group ("B&S") to study the pros and cons of such a referendum.
- March 1, 2012: The County Board votes down the proposed resolution for a referendum.
- March 2012: The LWVCC Board approves a revised proposal by B&S to instead study the criteria to be used when determining whether a government position or body should be elected or appointed. This was done in anticipation that the issue of the Recorder and Clerk would arise again, and with a desire that the League be able to take a position on the issue. At the May 2012 LWVCC Annual Meeting, the delegates approved doing the study, which B&S completes in early 2013.
- May, 2013: At the Annual Meeting, the delegates approved a new addition to *Where We Stand* that sets forth the criteria for "Elected vs. Appointed or Consolidation of Bodies or Offices."
- October 2015: Commissioner Fritchey announces he again is going to introduce a resolution to place a referendum on the November 2016 ballot to eliminate the elected Recorder of Deeds Office and transfer the duties to the County Clerk.
- June 29, 2016: The Cook County Board approves placing the referendum on the November ballot.
- July, 2016: B&S starts collecting facts to apply to the criteria set forth in the "Elected vs. Appointed" position, including interviewing the then Cook County Recorder of Deeds and Clerk, as well as clerks from other Illinois counties where the separately elected Recorder of Deeds position had been eliminated.
- September 7, 2016: B&S completes its report determining that, under the criteria of the existing League position, the League should support the referendum. Among other things, the report concludes that such a merger of the offices should result in at least a \$1 million annual savings. At the September LWVCC Board meeting, the Board votes its support.

- September to November, 2016: The LWVCC and the local Cook County Leagues publicize their support for the referendum, including appearing at forums and passing out literature to voters.
- November 8, 2016: The referendum passes, approving the transfer of the Recorder of Deeds' duties to the Cook County Clerk by December 7, 2020.
- March, 2017: The Cook County Board passes a resolution requiring periodic reports from the Recorder and Clerk regarding their progress in planning for the transfer of duties to the Clerk. Initially, the reports were to be every 6 months. During 2019 and 2020, the reports were to be submitted in January, March, July and October.
- May, 2019 thru September 2020: After failing to file any written reports, the Clerk and Recorder submits the first one in late April. B&S prepares, and the LWVCC sends, a letter to the Cook County Commissioners (copying the Recorder and Clerk) reminding them of the requirements of the 2017 resolution and urging that the Commissioners require that they be adhered to. B&S continues to monitor subsequent reports and prepares letters and public comments for the League to submit to the Commissioners regarding these reports. The Clerk's office responds verbally and in writing to the LWVCC, clarifying items along the way. The Clerk and Recorder submit their Final Plan in September 2020.
- October, 2020: B&S reviews the Clerk's proposed budget for 2021, which reflects the transfer of duties from the Recorder. B&S prepares and the LWVCC submits some "Observations and Comments" on the proposed budget in light of the Final Plan to the Commissioners and Clerk and Recorder. At the meeting on the Clerk's budget, some of the League's questions are asked, and the Clerk's office and Budget Director subsequently respond in writing to all the League's questions. The Clerk and Budget Director agree that there should be at least a \$1.1 million savings in 2021. The Clerk anticipates \$6.7 million in savings over the next 3 years.
- December 7, 2020: The Cook County Clerk assumes all duties of the Recorder of Deeds.

B&S will continue to monitor what actually happens, and you can expect the LWVCC to comment as appropriate.

In the meantime: a reminder that local Leagues in Cook County may utilize the LWVCC's "Appointed vs. Elected" position for applicable issues at the local level. https://www.lwvcookcounty.org/uploads/6/7/9/9/67994881/where_we_stand_-_2020_edition_rev_copy_4.pdf

--Pris Mims