**Annual Report of the Budget & Structure**

**Interest Group, May 2018-May 2019**

***Areas of Focus for 2018-19*** *(approved at May 2018 Annual Meeting)*

1. **Cook County and Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) government organization**
2. **Transparency of board operations**
3. **Observing/reporting and assessing budget processes**
4. **Follow-up on applicable LWVCC positions and past studies**

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)*

Structure, organization, transparency

* Reviewed Board and Committee agendas throughout the year for items of interest to League; communicated these to Observer Chair to assist Observers; and followed status of those items
* Completed meetings with all but 2 of the Cook County Commissioners from the 2018 Board. Focus was on
  + (1) budget process (value of mid-year budget meetings of Board; cost-cutting ideas of Commissioners; increasing transparency; ways for Board to encourage ending of *Shakman* cases; how to reduce absenteeism; need for comparison information on salaries and benefits);
  + (2) performance management program for Cook County departments, including the Annual Reports (can Commissioners tell whether departments doing a good job; use of better measures, best practices and benchmarks, and targets)
* November 2018 elections resulted in 7 new Commissioners
  + Early Jan. sent letter providing overview of League
  + Feb. thru April, met with all new Commissioners to further introduce League and to find out their interests; also raised several areas of League concern (status of planning for merger of Recorder’s office into that of County Clerk; number of late-filed items for Board agendas which reduces opportunity for review and early comment; ways to improve the County’s performance management program, including role of Commissioners; outstanding *Shakman* cases)
* Sent letter to President and Commissioners suggesting change in schedule for the meetings held to honor people and events (“Consent Agenda” meetings) which have been running two or three hours or more and pushing back start of Committee meetings which deal with the business of the County; have been told that Commissioners will be proposing change at the May Board meeting
* Reviewed quarterly public reports of the Office of the Independent Inspector General; sent letter thanking that Office for what it has accomplished
* Activities regarding *Shakman* cases (these hold that hiring, firing, promotions, and pay for all but a few “exempt” employees are to be determined based on merit, not politics)
  + President’s Office and those departments reporting to it found to be in substantial compliance in the fall of 2018 after 12 years of court supervision; sent letter of congratulations
  + Reviewed quarterly reports by court-appointed administrators over 3 other County areas: Recorder of Deeds since 2010; Assessor since 2012; and Clerk of the Court since 2018; saw that much to be done to come into substantial compliance
  + Sent letter to these 3 officials in February urging them to take necessary steps to achieve substantial compliance as soon as possible because League supports *Shakman* principles of merit rather than politics and because of the costs to the County (millions of dollars)
  + Met with Finance Chairman John Daley in March to suggest that either Finance or Finance Subcommittee on Litigation hold a hearing with representatives of 3 offices and the court-appointed administrators to encourage offices to achieve compliance; Chairman Daley already planning to submit proposal for such a hearing, which was done
  + Sent letter in support of the proposed hearing when item appeared on Board agenda; Board referred to Litigation Subcommittee
  + Prior to hearing on April 23, sent letter with attachment detailing status of 3 cases and submitting suggested questions to be asked of court-appointed administrators and the representatives from the 3 offices; also urged that Litigation continue to have regular oversight hearings
  + Observed hearing and pleased to see that Subcommittee Chair utilized all the questions submitted by League and that Subcommittee and then Board approved proposal to have quarterly hearings on the *Shakman* oversight status

Budget process and transparency

* Observed and reported on Mid-Year Budget Hearings (first-time held); also prepared written comments and testimony in support of these hearings, which are consistent with League position on the Board providing budget oversight throughout the year
* 2019 Cook County Budget Process that took place in October and November, 2018
  + League attended Finance Department’s overview of proposed 2019 budget presented to other key outside groups, including Civic Federation and Better Government Association
  + Observed and reported on the budget meetings of Finance Committee with all Cook County departments and final meetings to amend and approve the budget
  + Submitted letter in January to Finance Committee Chair and Budget Director identifying two areas of concern with budget process, both involving ways to improve transparency

Follow-up on past studies

* Follow-up on Recorder-Clerk merger: sent letter reminding Commissioners, Recorder, and Clerk of quarterly status reports on merger planning required by 2017 Board resolution, which reports are to include timeline and targets; sent because it appears that these requirements may have been forgotten
* Follow-up on Performance Management program for departments: observed one of the performance management review sessions held with departments under the President; have upcoming meeting with the County’s Performance Officer to discuss 2018 Annual Report just published and status of program