



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF DANE COUNTY, INC.

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Budget Testimony for 2019 Dane County Budget September 13, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Dane County. As you probably know, the League believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation in government.

You may also know that over the past decades, League members have observed meetings of the County Board and some county committees, and we occasionally contact county officials and committees about issues important to our members.

You may also know that in the last few years, we have encouraged members to attend a county, school district, or local government meeting at least once a year, and have researched and publicized some meeting opportunities to make it easier for our members to participate.

Based on our experience, we have some ideas on how Dane County could make it easier for its citizens to become involved in county issues. Some of our ideas would involve some expense, while others have minimal fiscal impact.

We applaud Chair Corrigan's creation of a team of Board Supervisors, Engage Dane, to develop strategies to further citizen participation in County government. We urge you to appropriate some funding that can be available in 2019 to implement those strategies, including the following:

1) A pilot project to video record most meetings of at least one standing committee. Rooms 201 and 354 in the City-County Building already have the equipment needed for video recording, and a standing committee could choose to meet in one of those rooms for those meetings it holds in the City-County Building.

This would require an arrangement with City Channel for staff to manage the recording. Similarly, an arrangement with the City of Madison about more regular access to room 354 would be needed, which should be easier now that several of the rooms in the renovated Municipal Building are equipped for video recording.

Committee meetings, particularly meetings of standing committees, are where the work that citizens need to see is done. The League believes that video access to the deliberations of these committees is necessary to engage citizens who cannot attend in person due to family, health, or work commitments, especially rural citizens who would need significant travel time to attend. City Channel recordings are available on demand on the City Channel website.

The goal should be to make available video recordings of all standing committees within several years.

2) A method for the public to communicate with all citizens who serve on committees and boards. Currently, the email addresses of most county staff and elected officials are identified on Legistar committee listings. However there is no contact information for most other members or for the committee staff.

There are several methods that could be used to enable citizens to contact committee members. The county email address for committee staff could be provided on Legistar, with an explanation that all committee members can be contacted by sending an email to that staff address with a request to forward. An email such as “allmembersXYZCommittee@countyofdane.gov” could be established for each committee. Or, all committee members could be asked to provide an email address on Legistar.

3) Meeting dates, times and locations should be published more than a few days in advance. Some committees make this information available well in advance, but some committees do not publish this information until the Friday before the meeting. Such abbreviated notice gives citizens and even other supervisors very little time to arrange schedules for child care, work, other meetings, or personal matters, and makes attendance less feasible.

We understand that agendas may not be finalized until shortly before the meetings, but when the dates, times, and locations are known they should be published on Legistar so that citizens who care about that committee’s issues have an opportunity to plan to attend.

If you choose to implement these three strategies, your constituents would be better able to communicate their opinions about issues to the appropriate committees and boards in a timely and effective way.