

Denton VOTER

*The League of Women Voters of Denton, Texas
Established 1961*

P.O. Box 424945 TWU Station
Denton, Texas 76204

January 2009

Sue Smith, President
Sondra Ferstl, VOTER Editor

www.lwvdenton.org

SPRING MEETING DATES

Thursday, January 29, 7 pm. City Council Term Limits. Discussion and consensus. See material elsewhere in this VOTER. Environmental Education Science and Technology Building (EESAT), Room 176 on the University of North Texas campus, Hickory at Avenue C. Get your hang tag from Peg La Point before parking.

Thursday, February 19, 7 pm.

Thursday, March 26, 7 pm.

Thursday, April 16, 7 pm.

Saturday, April 25, morning. Annual Meeting.

MEMBERSHIP DUES REDUCED FOR REMAINING MONTHS OF THIS LEAGUE YEAR

Individuals joining the League of Women Voters of Denton for the first time after January 1, 2009 will pay membership dues of \$25 per person. This payment covers the remainder of our 2008-2009 League year (until August 31, 2009). Make your check payable to LWV-Denton and send it to LWV-Denton, P.O. Box 424945 TWU Station, Denton, TX 76204.

PRESIDENT'S PODIUM

This welcome to all our members is a month late since I had to forgo the President's Podium last month. We are delighted you have chosen to join the League of Women Voters and hope you will attend as many general meetings as possible so we may get to know you better.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our very successful local program-planning meeting last December. As a follow-up to suggestions made there, we will have a busy and interesting spring. You have received consensus questions on Term Limits for City Council via email as well as printed in this VOTER. Please study the pros and cons to be ready for a lively discussion January 29th.

Annual Meeting is months away, but planning has already begun. If someone from the nominating committee calls, forget there is such a word as "no." Being on the board really is enjoyable and not an overwhelming commitment of time. There are a few exceptions, but most of those places on the board are filled.

Sue Smith

ISSUES CONCERNING CITY COUNCIL TERM LIMITS

The Denton League has long held a position on support of the City Charter and the council-manager form of government. We have not previously spoken on the question of term limits for council members. We held a public meeting this fall at which panel members shared their thoughts on the subject. We have identified several issues we believe need to be clarified soon by the Council. We would like the LWV-Denton to be able to speak to some or all of these issues, if we reach consensus on them. Your input at our January 29 meeting will help us to know whether we have general agreement on how to address these issues.

Not all issues list the arguments for and against because they are similar to those for other questions.

ISSUE ONE

Is there is a need to clarify whether council members may sit out a term and then return to office, even if they have previously served three terms?

Some arguments in favor:

Allowing a person to return to council after sitting out two years would allow people to make use of their experience and would improve institutional memory.

It would allow people to avoid “burnout” by taking a break in service.

If a person’s personal priorities changed, it would allow him/her to sit out until they were again able to serve.

An argument against:

Allowing a person to serve again might vest power in too few people.

ISSUE TWO

Is there is a need to clarify whether a council member may seek election as an at-large member after serving for three terms in a district position, or vice versa?

ISSUE THREE

Should prior service as a council member count toward the term limits of the Mayor?

Some arguments in favor of not counting service as a council member toward the term limits of the Mayor:

Because of the growing complexity of city government, it would be advantageous to have a mayor with council experience.

It is essential for Denton to be well represented on regional governing bodies. Membership on these councils requires a great deal of experience and continuity, which can be lacking when our representatives change frequently.

Someone with council experience would lend continuity and institutional memory in city government and long-term projects.

Some arguments against counting service as a council member toward the term limits of the Mayor:
This might allow the concentration of power within a faction of interested parties.

This has the potential to attract people to government who have a narrow personal political agenda.

There is a potential to give the incumbent an advantage as a candidate.

ISSUE FOUR

Should city council have term limits?

ISSUE FIVE

Should city council term limits remain at two years?

ISSUE SIX

Should Denton change to entirely single-member districts and eliminate at-large positions?

Some arguments in favor:

This would clarify the division of representation and eliminate the confusion about whether a council member may seek election as an at-large member after serving for three terms in a district position, or vice versa.

There is some indication that most citizens do not understand the reason for the current system and may not be voting to their best advantage, or not voting at all.

It would maintain the integrity of the system by clarifying unambiguously how many terms each officeholder can serve.

When the current system was created there was a need to allow citizens to vote for candidates outside their districts within the city. Now that the districts are more populous and diverse, it is less likely that one district can dominate the system.

The city has become so large that it should be divided into more districts.

Some arguments against:

Currently, a citizen has the opportunity to vote for two members of council (one at-large and one in their district). Theoretically, this provides more access and influence.

At-large council positions were designed to allow an office holder to represent the interests of the entire community.

*Copies of the current wording of the Denton City Charter on term limits will be distributed at the January 29th meeting. **Bring this copy of the Denton VOTER with you to the meeting.***

DECEMBER MEETING A SUCCESS!

We enjoyed a fun and enlightening gathering in December, with outstanding contributions from the membership, wonderful food, and great fellowship. Thanks to Sondra Ferstl for suggesting the format. Thanks to Maggie Dodd and Rosemary Witmer for researching issues in the Denton Independent School District and Denton County government.

After lively discussion, we settled on the following subjects for upcoming meetings: Denton City Council term limits; the new property maintenance codes; the state-wide redistricting study; issues of planning and zoning on the county level; and the national incentive to eliminate the electoral college. Depending on time, we may be adding a program on year-round schooling.

I was gratified to see so many members at the party and to see the high level of interest in the topics of the upcoming meetings. I urge everyone to take advantage of these opportunities during the spring. One of the purposes of the League is to educate ourselves on a wide range of issues and then help other members of the community to be as well informed as possible. Please join us in this gratifying effort.

Peg La Point, Program VP

RECEIVE YOUR DENTON VOTER ELECTRONICALLY

If you aren't already receiving your Denton VOTER electronically, you can do so by sending a note with your email address to Sondra Ferstl at smferstl@charter.net. Paper copies will continue to be mailed to those who prefer to receive them that way.

CLIMATE CHANGE TASK FORCE

The Climate Change Task Force was established in response to the LWVUS Board designating climate change as a priority for advocacy. While the LWVUS supports efforts to mitigate climate change, many of the issues within this broad category need discussion and explanation. The task force was charge with researching and writing substantive supporting materials (background papers) for the LWVUS position on climate change.

We are reprinting in this issue of the *Denton VOTER* one of these background papers, "Staying Warm and Living Green" which gives tips for analyzing the energy efficiency of your home's heating system and improving your home's energy performance.

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STAYING WARM *and* LIVING GREEN

Edited by Peg La Point from an article by Eleanor Revelle (LWVIL and LWVUS Climate Change Task Force Member)

Heating and cooling represent a major portion of our utility bills. Not only is that hard on the checkbook; it also means increased greenhouse gas emissions. What is a thrifty, ecologically-minded person to do?

Improving Your Home's Performance

You have no control over the outside temperature, but you can control the energy usage of your home. By now, we should all have replaced our incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents, but there are many other energy-saving practices.

Dialing down the thermostat is the most direct step you can take. Every degree that you lower the setting on your thermostat in winter (or raise it in the summer) will result in roughly a three percent reduction in the amount of energy used.

Installing a programmable thermostat can also bring significant energy savings. By adjusting the temperature setting for your home, this simple device makes it easy to automatically adjust the setting—for example, when you're asleep or away for the day.

Adding insulation is one of the most cost-effective improvements you can make, and the attic is the best and easiest place to start. Proper insulation levels in the walls, foundation, and basement or crawl space will also help make your house tighter—and more comfortable.

Sealing air leaks—a major source of heat and cooling loss in homes—is another very important energy-saver. Caulking around windows, sealing outlet and switch plate covers, and making sure doors seal tightly is critically important.

Heat blocking window screens are an extremely effective and inexpensive way to reduce the heat load from windows that receive direct sunlight. They look and act like insect screens but block up to 90% of the heat.

You can spot many of these problem areas on your own with a do-it-yourself **home energy audit**. Denton Municipal Electric will perform a free energy audit. They have an on-line version of the audit, but having a professional actually monitor your home is much more effective and informative.

The third area for attention is your home's **HVAC system**. You can improve its efficiency by insulating ducts and checking to be sure the ducts do not leak, changing the air filter regularly, and arranging for regular professional maintenance.

Your heating service company can also advise you as to whether replacing your existing HVAC system with a new, high-efficiency unit would make sense. If a system is more than five years old, an upgrade to the newer, more efficient systems will probably return the investment. The same is true of refrigerators, which consume a significant amount of energy.

Denton Municipal Electric has just instituted a GreenSense Energy Efficiency Rebate Program for customers who perform a wide variety of improvements to their homes. They are offering rebates of 50 percent on the cost of a wide variety of energy saving improvements such as sunscreens, replacement windows, attic insulation and new heating and cooling systems. Details are available from the office of DME or by going to cityofdenton.com and typing GreenSense Energy Efficiency Rebate Program into the search engine. There are some limits to the amount of the rebate, depending on the upgrade. The program has a funding limit, so if you are planning upgrades it would be wise to do it soon.

If you are planning to remodel your current home or build a new house, you have an opportunity to “build green” from the start. By making it a priority to incorporate energy-efficient design features and take advantage of new technologies and materials, you can have a high-performance home that minimizes energy consumption and maximizes comfort and durability.

But you don’t have to build a new house to save energy. Every small step that each of us takes to improve our homes’ energy efficiency will achieve savings and help reduce global warming.

Resources for Home Energy Audits

The U.S. Department of Energy’s *Consumer’s Guide to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy* (www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your_home/) includes a helpful tutorial on home energy audits as well as detailed information about insulation, sealing air leaks, and heating systems.

Home Energy Saver (<http://hes.lbl.gov/>) is a web-based do-it-yourself energy audit tool designed to help consumer identify the best ways to save energy in their homes and find the information and resources to make those savings happen.

Consumers can find a certified energy rater in their state through the Residential Energy Services Network (RSNET) Certified Rater Directory (www.resnet.us/directory/raters.aspx).

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