

Report: Westshore Council of Governments (WCOG) meeting, Aug. 14, 2013
by Conda Boyd, Sue Fink and Susan Murnane, LWV observers, Bay Village Chapter

This report, which contains observations and selected highlights of a meeting of the WCOG, is the first in a new series by members of the League of Women Voters - Cuyahoga Area. It is not an official statement of the LWV.

The Westshore Council of Governments was founded in 1971 "to foster cooperation between municipalities in all areas of municipal service." The mayors of the six WCOG cities meet on the second Tuesday of the month, 9:30-11:30 a.m., at the Lakewood Women's Pavilion. Official minutes are prepared by Mayor Summers' office. All meetings are open to the public.

Present: Mayors Bobst (Rocky River), Clough (Westlake), Sutherland (Bay Village), Summers (Lakewood)

Absent: Mayors Kennedy (North Olmsted), Patton (Fairview Park)

Grant ceremony began 9:30; meeting called to order 9:51 without a quorum; Mayor Sutherland arrived 9:58; meeting adjourned 11:30

CERT grants

Dominion East Ohio and Friends for the Community Foundation presented grants to Westshore Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) for two generators and other equipment.

Guest: Jim Renacci, US Congress District 16

Discussion focused on two broad topics: infrastructure and Affordable Healthcare Act implementation.

Sewers/Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) compliance: Infrastructure in most WCOG cities is old, with a "pollution is the solution" design for managing overflow that is no longer viable. Both public sewers and connections from private housing need remediation. Ohio EPA requirements are often more stringent than for the U.S. EPA. Both agencies present moving targets. All mayors present questioned their logistical and financial capacity to deliver. One funding source might be Section 594 funds, which the Army Corps of Engineers administers.

Power grid: On the tenth anniversary of the massive power outage, aging infrastructure remains a national security issue. Can Congress put pressure on electric companies to modernize? Burying lines would cost about \$1 million per mile. Congressman Renacci stated that in Ohio, most electric plants are coal, and EPA mandates to reduce power plants' emissions increase energy costs in

Ohio more than in other states.

Community Development Block Grant Program: Lakewood receives significant funds directly. Mayor Summers stated that the process is citizen-driven and works well. Cuyahoga County administers additional funds. Some cities, including Bay Village, do not qualify because there are no large pockets of poverty.

Infrastructure funding: Traditionally, gasoline taxes funded improvements. Rates have not increased since the early 1990s. Revenue has been hurt by better automobile mileage and the economic downturn. Congressman Renacci argued that an increase in gasoline taxes would fuel inflation in truck-delivered goods. Mayor Summers countered that a user tax is the fairest approach, and it might help stem outward flight. Mayor Sutherland agreed, stating that at some point public transportation will become more economical. Mayor Clough discussed the need to develop trust that funding will go for its intended purpose. Citizens are paying federal and state taxes but not getting that money back in benefits.

Affordable Care Act (ACA): Most mayors present said that ACA implementation is "unworkable" and "unpredictable." Congressman Renacci stated that avoiding ACA requirements is driving creation of jobs that are only part-time. On the other hand, Mayor Summers observed that the cost of uninsured care is unsustainable.

Meeting with Governor Kasich

The mayors meet with the governor Aug. 20. Agenda items include HB5 (revising municipal income tax laws), the Multi-Agency Radio Communications System (MARCS), state and federal EPA requirements and tax reform.

Future Topics

Tentative topics for September include updates on narcotics and mental health. October's tentative agenda includes MARCS and Share Ohio, an inventory system that could provide a basis to track and share public works equipment.