

# Options for Local Government

## October 7, 2010

### Consensus Questions

#### Background

The League of Women Voters' process for determining positions (upon which subsequent actions may be taken) is to arrive at consensus on a position statement based on work produced in a study of the issue. At the October 7, 2010 consensus meeting, the topic will be the Options for Local Government study. This study was developed by a study group who worked on the issue of county governance from September 2009 through June 2010 and presented the study on June 24, 2010 at a public meeting. At that meeting there was also considerable discussion about the issues in the study.

It should be noted that although the study was titled Options for Local Government, it was primarily a study of county governance. However, in the analysis of options for county governance, the possibility of consolidation of services with cities was considered. Hence, the study became a local government study, even though there was not a comprehensive review of city governance in the same way county governance was reviewed.

#### Getting to Consensus

Because the scope of this study was quite broad, and because there is already a League position on county government, the study group offers some questions to begin the consensus conversation. These are not intended to limit the range of discussion. If there are other questions that the League should discuss on this topic, participants should feel free to bring those up in the conversation.

Here is the League's current position on county government:

*“The League favors a county government which:*

- *Has a legislative body which is representative economically, geographically, and allows for subcommittees.*
- *Separates powers with administration the responsibility of an appointed or elected executive.*
- *Has a centralized personnel system.*
- *Has open discussion of policy issues and well-defined channels for citizen input and review.*
- *Is adequately financed.*

*Thurston County should take advantage of the Home Rule Amendment to the State Constitution which gives the county the authority to design a governmental structure tailored to our unique county needs and provide the flexibility for future change.*

*In our county a legislative body larger than three would better represent our diverse citizens and allow for meaningful subcommittee work. An elected executive would be possible under Home Rule, whereas our appointed executive is the only possibility under the present system.”*

Suggested questions for discussion and potential consensus follow.

**1) Should the current League position on county government be changed or should it remain the same?**

Note: The study group concluded that at a minimum, this position should be retained.  
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**2) If the current League position should be changed, in what way should it be changed?**

Note: The study group concluded that the current position should be supplemented with the following additional text:

*“Opportunities to improve efficiencies among cities and the county by consolidating services should also be examined by freeholders when preparing a Home Rule Charter”*

**3) Should the county commissioners place a freeholders election on a future ballot?**

Note: The study group concluded that the county commissioners should be encouraged to place a freeholders election on a future ballot and to do so without the need for a citizens petition process if the intention is to modify only county governance. If city governance is affected, a petition will be required for a freeholders election.

**4) The former State of Washington Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (now the Department of Commerce) made a number of recommendations to the State Legislature regarding county structure and finance. Should the Thurston County League request the State League to lobby the state legislature to adopt the CTED recommendations of its November 2007 report?**

Note: The study group concluded that the nine CTED recommendations would be very helpful in addressing the structural problems experienced by all counties and that the State League should lobby the State Legislature to adopt the recommendations.