



Summary of LWV ABC meeting with County Commissioners on Oct. 31, 2017

In October 2017 several members of LWV ABC Observer Corps met with Anoka County Commissioners Sivarajah and Gamache as well Jerry Soma, Anoka County Administrator to address our concerns from two years of observing Anoka County Board and Committee meetings.

The meeting started with LWV ABC Observer Corps members thanking the board for acting on issues that we identified as they occurred such as the availability of complete board packets, added agenda items, time for public comment at committee meetings and public hearing notifications.

We went on to address what we considered the most serious concerns. We had (and continue to have) questions about the decision-making process. It often appears that decisions are made prior to board or committee meetings. This was our primary issue and one of the reasons that the observer corps was formed. There is little discussion about agenda items at the board meetings and often the same is true for the management committee meeting. In our discussion with the county we found that many discussions about policy and programs happen at staff meetings and information is then passed up to the committees and board. The process for decision making is somewhat less than transparent and it will continue to be a focus of the Observer Corps.

Another key item that we discussed was that the agenda often listed resolutions by number but with no details for the public to understand what the resolution was about. In at least one instance an item was acted on even though it was listed with an incorrect resolution number. Since our meeting it appears that the agendas now include more information about the agenda items.

The Anoka County Board does not allow public input at board meetings. We explained that Anoka is one of only two metro area counties that do not have time set aside for the public to ask questions or make a statement. The Board has no intentions of changing their policy on public input. When we first began observing there also was not a time for public input at management committee meetings. Members of the Observer Corps are now able to ask questions or make a statement at the end of the management meetings. This is a significant change, however not allowing the public to speak at the board meetings dismisses the spirit of the Minnesota Open Meeting law.

By observing the Anoka County Board in action, the LWV ABC Observer Corps was able to gather data and information that we reported back to the County Board as suggestions for improving transparency. Although not all concerns were taken seriously, we have made progress. The County Board's reaction to the Observer Corps feedback reinforces the need for an active Observer Corps not just to observe the county but to observe government agencies throughout the region.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeorgette Knoll