

## ***CH-UH Chapter meets with their new county representatives***

Braving a nasty winter storm on February 2, members and guests of the Heights chapter of the League of Women Voters, Cuyahoga Area, gathered for a light supper and an opportunity to chat with the new county council representatives representing Cleveland Heights and University Heights: Julian Rogers (District 10-Cleveland Heights) and Sunny Simon (District 11-University Heights). Attendees were rewarded with a most informative evening.

The evening's format contained no speeches—only questions and answers. Some of the issues covered include the following:

### **The new council—**

One clear and positive impression is that the new county council comprises eleven hard-working, focused members. The charter designates the council seats as part-time positions with salaries of \$45,000. However, facing the task of forming a new government from scratch, current members of the council are averaging 40-hour weeks. Some are juggling other jobs, but the majority is working full-time as county representatives.

Both Ms. Simon and Mr. Rogers expressed positive feelings about their fellow council members, describing a group that is bonding well as they tackle the enormous task of building a new governmental structure. The charter, a mere 25 pages, provides only a basic skeleton for building county governance.

### **Challenges—**

Ms. Simon remarked that she discovered, and is studying, a book describing the more than 50 countywide agencies and commissions. Grappling with these bodies will be a major challenge for the new county council. Those in our League who worked on the A, B, C, D's (Agencies, Boards, Commissions, and special Districts) study will appreciate what this entails.

The new charter prominently featured the importance of economic development. The council has formed a council committee for economic development, but the charter also required formation of an off-council nine-member economic development commission and specified selection of its membership. One member, which council must select, is to represent nonprofits and educational institutions involved in economic development. Ms. Simon and Mr. Rogers noted that defining this latter selection will be a complex task for the council. It may ultimately fall to the charter review committee to provide an improved definition.

### **Issues for charter review—**

One looming issue for charter review is the overlap of some of the council representatives' terms and the redrawing of district lines, which will take place as a result of the 2010 census. For example, Ms. Simon was elected to a four-year term for District 11 but the lines will be redrawn in the middle of her term. The change could separate her from the communities and voters she was elected to represent.

### **Accomplishments—**

The council is taking steps to handle a backlog of three to five thousand pending real estate property appraisal cases. It effectively countered pressure from both the county executive and the media to “fire,” regardless of qualifications, all those who had been previously seated on the Board or Revisions. While the Board of Revisions clearly has had problems, the council decided that such an approach would not be fair to those on the prior board who were, in fact, qualified.

### **The future –**

Ms. Simon expressed interest in the history of county reform efforts and asked about the league’s decades-long support for reform. She was given a copy of the brochure the league researched and published in 1998 describing the history of reform. As Mr. Rogers read from the brochure a list of reforms desired by League, everyone agreed that these were still current concerns, and, more importantly, that the new county governing structure could help address them.

Both representatives expressed optimism about how the new government was developing and its promises for the region. Citing an example of improved communication between municipalities and county governance, Mr. Rogers noted that in monitoring his district he became aware of the sustainability study commissioned by the Cleveland Heights City Council. The study impressed him and he believes that other municipalities and the county, as a whole, could and should take this approach. The previous county government, he felt, did not have the infrastructure to facilitate this level of awareness between the county and the cities. Both he and Ms. Simon believe that the new governance structure will foster regional solutions and cooperative efforts among the municipalities.