



The League of Women Voters Of Greater Birmingham
P.O. Box 530522
Birmingham, AL 35253
205-583-5000
vrandolph@lwggb.org
www.lwggb.org

The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham is pleased that several community groups and individual citizens have joined us here. We are here to express our support for a professional county manager for Jefferson County.

In 1985 the League began an extensive study and then reached consensus among our members in 1986 in favor of a professional county manager. This position was developed in response to a consent decree requirement that Jefferson County change from 3 commissioners elected county wide to 5 commissioners elected by district. We agree that election of commissioners by districts promotes equitable representation. But this leaves each commissioner overseeing a county department and accountable to just their district. The administration of countywide programs must be accountable to the entire county. Since the Commission is elected by districts it makes sense to have their legislation and policy funneled through a countywide professional hired to carry out the focus of the commission. This would ensure that the entire County is represented in critical actions and decisions. The Commissioners would set policy and goals. And the professional county manager would be accountable to all five Commissioners so that all interests are taken into account when decisions are made.

We have continued to express support for a county manager but three years ago we recognized the need had become more apparent. The financial situations with the sewer and the general fund this past year make it critical to secure a professional manager who can help the county change and avoid the pitfalls as it gets back on its feet. A county manager would have done due diligence on the need for a lobby firm in Washington and found out that the current group being suggested appears out of line with the typical and the amount currently proposed is far more than they usually charge. This is not a personal issue but an issue of asking someone with education and experience with government operations and policy to oversee daily activities in response to commission leadership. Several counties in Alabama and counties throughout the United States have effective county managers who assist the county leadership in achieving the goals of the elected commissioners. Close to Jefferson County is Shelby County, which hired a county manager when the county was in deep financial trouble. With his help they have moved to a pay as you go process for new buildings and projects. Most importantly the financial situation has vastly improved in Shelby County.

The manager must have education and experience in public administration, budgeting and personnel management. A professional county manager will allow for administrative accountability to the total electorate. A county manager will allow for separation of legislative and executive focus, so essential in our democracy. And importantly, a county manager will provide efficient and cost-effective operation as all departments will report to the manager and this will allow for cross department use of personnel as needed.

What can you do? In order to have a county manager the State Legislature must pass a bill permitting it. We hear that some legislators say that the public has not contacted them. Write or call your state legislators, both the representatives and senators, asking that they support a bill for a professional county manager. You don't have to be lengthy but at least let them know you want a county manager. Certainly you may express your reasons for a change. How do you find your legislators? If you use a computer, do a search for the Alabama legislators and you will find a page that helps you look up your legislators by zip code. Also the addresses and telephone numbers are listed for each legislator. Our web site <http://www.lwggb.org> also has a listing of the greater Birmingham legislators in a document titled Alabama Government at Your Fingertips.