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LEAGUE of WOMEN VOTERS® of LANE COUNTY

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July 29, 2003

Peter Sorenson, Chair
Board of Lane County Commissioners
125 East 8th Avenue
Eugene, OR 97401

At the July 2 Commissioner's meeting in the conference room, there were many citizens wishing to speak during the public comment period. All the seats were occupied so people had to stand, sit on the floor or remain in the area outside of the meeting room. Since there is no public address system in the conference room, some remarks of staff, commissioners and the public could not be heard easily. This was true for people who do not consider themselves hearing impaired.

Harris Hall would seem to be the most appropriate place for commissioners to meet especially when the discussion items are of considerable public interest. While Harris Hall is a large space, it does have a public address system, comfortable and adequate seating for the public and officials, and it was built with taxpayers dollars for the purpose of holding commissioner meetings. A concern that the setting in Harris Hall invites speech-making could be easily addressed by establishing specific time limits for remarks from the public and by the commission members being disciplined in their use of time.

In terms of using staff time, other bodies in state and local government set times certain on their agendas to accommodate efficient use of personnel who need to participate. A phone call from the meeting room prior a staff's agenda item could allow added flexibility to the meeting.

The League of Women Voters of Lane County recognizes that the county and all government bodies face tremendous challenges to meet the needs of a growing and more diverse population but with diminishing resources. Staff members are expected to do more with less, often taking on additional responsibilities as personnel are reduced. In light of these circumstances, we believe that public understanding of and support for essential governmental functions can be gained by increased communication and open, accessible discussions. It should not be difficult or uncomfortable for citizens to participate. Government is the public's business.

The League would be happy to discuss these issues with you in order to find workable solutions.

Sincerely,

Janet Calvert, Co-President

copies: Bobby Green
Anna Morrison ✓
Bill Van Vactor

Tom Lininger
Bill Dwyer