

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF ORANGE-DURHAM-CHATHAM

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For Immediate Release

March 23, 2009

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League of Women Voters to Host Forum April 1 on Local Election Methods in Durham

The League of Women Voters of Orange, Durham, and Chatham Counties will host a forum on the election methods used in Durham for its local elections. Participants will include Donald L. Horowitz, James B. Duke Professor of Law and Political Science, Robert P. Joyce, UNC Professor of Public Law and Government, Torrey Dixon of FairVoteNC and Bob Hall, Executive Director of Democracy NC. The forum will be moderated by Judie Burke, President of the League of Women Voters of North Carolina.

The forum was inspired by recent suggestions to modify how Durham conducts its municipal elections. “The League of Women Voters encourages informed participation in government,” said Bessie Carrington, who is organizing the forum. “We wanted to provide the citizens of Durham with an opportunity to be informed about the different election methods currently used in Durham and some recently proposed changes.”

North Carolina law authorizes the use of four different election methods in municipalities: partisan primary and election, non-partisan primary and election, non-partisan election with run off, or non-partisan plurality. Durham uses the non-partisan primary and general election method for its municipal election. Nearly 90% of North Carolina’s municipalities use this method in their municipal elections. With this method, the top vote-getter wins the seat, even if they did not receive a majority of the vote. County officials are elected with partisan primaries, with the winning candidates competing in a general partisan election.

The Durham Board of Elections recently asked the City Council to switch to the non-partisan plurality method for municipal elections as a budget-cutting measure. “It is an issue of saving taxpayer money,” explained Board of Elections Chair Ron Gregory in his request to the City Council. “This action will save the City \$170,000-\$185,000 this year.” The City Council will hold a public hearing on April 6 to hear comments on the proposal.

In 2007, Cary and Hendersonville were the first cities to participate in a pilot program to evaluate the use of instant run-off voting (IRV) in their municipal elections. The state has authorized continuation of the pilot program in a limited number of municipalities that would like to participate. Hendersonville has elected to use IRV in its upcoming election, while Cary is still considering its options. Durham has not participated in the pilot thus far.

Under instant-runoff voting, voters rank their choices in a given race, rather than just voting for a single candidate. If no candidate gets a majority of “first-choice” votes, the alternative choices of

people who voted for the losing candidates are counted. “Democracy NC endorses IRV because it increases efficiency in elections and makes it easier for more voters to have a say in who wins,” said Bob Hall. The League of Women Voters supports instant run-off voting as a cost-saving elimination of the need for separate run-off elections.

The LWV forum will be held at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, April 1, at the downtown Durham Public Library. It is open to the public.