

**LWVBA VOTER
October 2005**

LWVBA President's Message – October 2005

Update from LWV of the Bay Area – CEQA Reform

Our meeting on CEQA Reform on September 24 was well attended and featured an update on the status of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Many of us remember when CEQA was enacted in 1970 and became an important process for documenting the environmental impacts, reasonable alternatives, and feasible mitigation of significant impacts of both public and private projects. The process required an opportunity for public comment and required that the public agency respond to comments prior to approval of projects. (see the www.opr.ca.gov for requirements).

Over the past 35 years, as a result of the CEQA process, better decisions have been made by public agencies and citizens who were empowered to affect the decision - particularly neighborhood groups who previously were given no opportunity for input on projects or their comments were simply ignored. Panelists at our meeting generally agreed it was a good law, but it has its flaws and could stand some improvement. Issues cited were that EIRs miss the larger regional impacts because of their focus is project-specific, and an EIR can be challenged in court by NIMBYs (in some cases to gain leverage for union wages) or when a public agency simply “shuts its ears” to the facts. For this reason, EIRs have become very lengthy and technical documents, primarily to avoid lawsuits.

Proposals for improvement of CEQA include a practice of doing a more complete initial study, analyzing the feasibility of alternatives, the use of Specific Plans (larger area than a single project) and Master EIRs first (this has been used in the City of San Jose) then have only a “focused” environmental review to determine if the project complies with the plan. Legislation is pending that would provide some of these reforms - SB 832, Perata, is being used as a spot bill for reform language in the next session, and SB 1024 would provide the funding for needed planning as part of a statewide infrastructure bond measure for the Nov. 2006 ballot. There should be a clear summary of the environmental impact in plain English, clear definitions of what is a significant impact, and retention of a participation process regarding projects at the local level, regardless of the abbreviated EIR review process.

P.S. – As a result of our resolution at the State Convention in May, LWV California has sent a letter to Gov. Schwarzenegger on the issue of CEQA Reform. You can check it out at www.lwvc.org

Linda Craig, President
President@lwbba-ca.org

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Calendar:

Thursday, October 27, 2005, 8 am-4 pm, “Affordable Housing: Myths and Reality”
Association of Bay Area Governments General Assembly at Marriott City Center, Oakland,
see www.abag.ca.gov

Friday, October 28, 2005, Noon – 1:30, Natural Resources/Water Committee. EBMUB Bldg, 375 11th Street,
Oakland. For more info contact natural_resources@lwbba-ca.org

Thursday, November 10, 2005, 12:15 – 2pm, IN Committee South. Westminster House, 457 Kingsley, Palo Alto.
Please send agenda items to Iris R. Winogron: programvp@lwbba-ca.org or (510) 482-4439

SAVE THESE DATES:

Friday, January 27, 2006 — Bay Area League Day: **State of the Bay – Restoration and Access** at Unitarian Church, Oakland

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Web Sites:

Bay Area Monitor: <http://www.bayareamonitor.org>

LWVC: <http://www.ca.lwv.org>

LWVBA: <http://www.lwvba-ca.org>

LWVUS: <http://www.lwv.org>

Smart Voter: <http://www.smartvoter.org>

Barbara Boxer: <http://boxer.senate.gov/>

Dianne Feinstein: <http://feinstein.senate.gov/>

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Barbara Boxer: senator@boxer.senate.gov

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Arnold Schwarzenegger: Governor@Governor.ca.gov