



JOURNAL

A Public Policy Monthly from the Citizens League



Change the process, change the outcome

If we provide citizens with a meaningful process for civic engagement will we get more meaningful results?

by Stacy Becker

In early June, the Citizens League held a workshop on services for an aging society. The workshop was an experiment of sorts, to see if an intensive burst of analysis and ideas could produce solutions that so far have eluded a multitude of more traditional efforts. Indeed, there is no shortage of good, thoughtful people devoted to aging services. We just haven't been able to leap the fence to create the types of policies that we will need to deal with a country transformed by the new demographics of aging.

Throughout our Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150) we have experimented with new citizen involvement practices because we believe these are integral to developing more effective solutions. Our work has been guided by a finding from our 2006 statewide survey about the barriers that prevent greater civic involvement. The most frequent answer among those surveyed: traditional processes to involve citizens are "all talk and no action." Respondents cited time constraints a close second. Taken together these two barriers suggest a powerful diagnosis of what civic engagement must deliver. Our lives are hectic and time is one of our most precious resources, so time becomes a barrier to civic involvement. If my time doesn't produce anything, I'll choose to spend my time doing something more meaningful.

Meaningful is the operative word here—and it is double-barreled. In every MAP 150 project, one of the first things participants ask is, "How will the results be used?" This was true for the aging services workshop. Participants want to know that their work won't just

sit on a shelf. But in order to use the results, the work has to be good. Thus there's a quid pro quo: workshop organizers provide a venue and process for attendees to contribute knowledge and expertise, and in return participants must work hard to understand how their collective expertise informs an issue and suggests solutions.

What the aging workshop did differently

- Participants were given the charge of creating and "naming" very specific policy ideas. Take a look at most policy reports today and you'll see that they are filled with recommendations that would be virtually impossible to disagree with because they are stated as objectives, not policies: "reduce truancy," "improve public transit," etc. Participants were asked to create the specifications for their idea so that a group of policy engineers could do the actual design. For example, in order to design a car, engineers need to know things such as, what price are we aiming for? How fast must it go? What environmental and safety standards must it meet? Workshop participants were asked to identify key features and parameters of their ideas which would give direction to a subsequent group actual designing the policy. The intent was to develop an idea to engineer backward from, not to start with the existing system and engineer forward, a process which often keeps us firmly rooted in the existing system, even when that system is no longer suitable for solving the problems at hand. (See page 6 inset for examples.)

The intent was to develop an idea to engineer backwards from, not to start with the existing system and engineer forward.

neers could do the actual design. For example, in order to design a car, engineers need to know things such as, what price are we aiming for? How fast must it go? What environmental and safety standards must it meet? Workshop participants were asked to identify key features and parameters of their ideas which would give direction to a subsequent group actual designing the policy. The intent was to develop an idea to engineer backward from, not to start with the existing system and engineer forward, a process which often keeps us firmly rooted in the existing system, even when that system is no longer suitable for solving the problems at hand. (See page 6 inset for examples.)

continued on page 6

INSIDE

2

Connections

3

Viewpoint:
A place at the table
for self-interest

4

Policy Redux:
Nursing home
and aging care

6

Take Note:
Traffic and flow—
timing is everything

CONNECTIONS

Building a League of Citizens



Citizens League Board Chair Kathy Mock with the McCarthy Center for Public Policy and Civic Engagement 2008 Civic Engagement Fellows. The students, from the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University, met with students from the Minnesota International Center at Policy and a Pint: The China Tradeoff. To see more pictures from the event, go to flickr.com/photos/citizensleague.

Policy and a Pint: Youth and Politics

September 2, 2008

Doors at 5:30 p.m.; program at 6 p.m.

Varsity Theater

1308 Fourth Street S.E., Minneapolis

\$10; \$5 for students with valid ID

While the Republican National Convention takes place across town, we will explore how young people today are changing politics, elections, and public discourse. Afterwards, join the Emerging Leaders Committee to continue the conversation at the Loring Pasta Bar.

Also: Save the date for the Policy and a Pint Election Night Party, November 4 at the UBS Forum at Minnesota Public Radio!

Register for all of the Policy and a Pint Election Years Series events at www.citizensleague.org.

The Policy and a Pint Election Year Series is presented by the Citizens League and 89.3 The Current and is sponsored by Best Buy.

Staff transitions

After four years with the Citizens League, **Victoria Ford** will be leaving the staff in September. She is moving to Pennsylvania, where she will spend the next year as a resident student at Pendle Hill, a Quaker community outside of Philadelphia. Victoria would love to stay in touch with Citizens Leaguers and can be reached at vmford@gmail.com.

Catherine Wood was hired in June as office manager and external relations assistant. She also serves as assistant to Sean Kershaw. **Casey Hudek** replaced Cat as the membership and engagement intern. To learn more about Cat, Casey or any of the Citizens League staff or interns, go to www.citizensleague.org/who/staff.

Regional Policy Conference

Be part of the Citizens League effort to activate regional leaders to work on a set of common goals and begin to build a new regional consensus. Those who attend will work to identify agreements through examination of questions such as:

- What are our competitive advantages in the Twin Cities region and what do we need to do to be economically competitive in the future? Based on the Brookings work, these assets could be categorized under innovation, human capital, infrastructure and quality places.
- To what extent are resources focused to maximize our competitive advantages?
- To what extent is leadership focused?
- To what extent is our problem-solving focused?
- How do we focus our resources into flexible and adaptive systems?
- How is family stability an asset for our region?
- How can we build "communities for a lifetime?"

Go to www.citizensleague.org for more information and to register for this event.

Take the Citizens League Member Survey

The Citizens League Member Survey is up and ready to go. It takes only 10-15 minutes and really helps us out—fill it out at www.citizensleague.org.

Your financial support matters!

You can see from these pages and from recent Journals that the Citizens League has had a real impact on policy and civic engagement this past year. This summer we are embarking on our most ambitious policy agenda in over a decade, and we are expanding opportunities for civic leadership development and engagement.

You will soon receive our annual summer fundraising request, and we urge you to consider a contribution at any level. From \$25 to \$2500, your financial support helps us to achieve our mission of building civic imagination and capacity in Minnesota on policy issues like poverty, water, transportation, and healthcare.

Contact us with questions, or go to our web site at www.citizensleague.org/contribute to support this work. Thanks!



Modernizing the myth of leaving your self-interest at the door

What happens when students, taxpayers, seniors, and all citizens speak out on the issues that matter most to Minnesotans?

by Sean Kershaw

It is perhaps one of the most enduring statements about past Citizens League work that when people participated in our study committees they would “leave their self-interest at the door.” I suppose we could debate what this meant historically, or whether it was even true, but as we wrap up our work on the Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150), two lessons related to self-interest have emerged that can greatly impact our future work.

First, self-interest simply *is*; you can suppress it, but you cannot leave it behind. It exists all the time—and it can be very useful. The literal meaning of self-interest refers to one’s motivation for taking an action, and to the relative value of an individual’s interest in relation to others. Usually we think of self-interest as *selfish* interest, the interests of the individual supersede those of others. But enlightened self-interest, individual interest defined in relation to the good of the larger group, is essential to change.

To tackle our toughest public policy problems, we desperately need a wide range of stakeholders to bring their *enlightened* self-interest to the table to innovate and improve the systems and institutions that matter most to public policy in Minnesota.

Second, we learned that our new civic guidelines are on the right track, and that to solve our state’s policy problems we need to make sure that the people impacted by a problem help to define the problem, but do so in light of a common set of civic and democratic principles (our collective self-interest). This will ensure that individuals and diverse groups participate and contribute from their particular situation (their self-interest) but do so in constructive tension with what is good for whole (their enlightened self-interest). We believe that the ability to negotiate within this tension produces better policy recommendations, and better motivates stakeholders to take action and implement solutions.

Some examples: In order to fix high schools we need to involve high school students, along with parents, teachers, and community members. To improve

We desperately need a wide range of stakeholders to bring their *enlightened* self-interest to the table

older adult services we need to involve those who use these services. To improve Minnesota, we all need to see our self-interest in these issues, whether or not we are immediate stakeholders.

Why self-interest matters

From schools to health care to transportation our public policy challenges are more complex than they were a generation ago. There are more actors, and more ways to influence those actors for good or for ill. It is much harder to apply typical hierarchical and government-only solutions.

Take transportation, for example. Certainly there are many examples of unenlightened self-interest we could point to in the transportation debate, from federal pork-barrel spending to state and local gridlock. But addressing issues like congestion and access to transit is complicated. Government leadership and resources are critical, but to meaningfully reform our transportation policies and implement solutions we need all individuals and institutions to bring their self-interest to the table, to see their role in the problem, and their place in the solution strategies. All of us are policy makers every time we decide when, where, and how to go to work, or to the store, or where to live.

What we have learned so far

Enlightened self-interest can help us solve our complex policy problems. First, it is extremely difficult to frame a problem correctly without involving the people impacted by the problem. They have important and often overlooked information and knowledge. Second, involving stakeholders

builds the motivation and buy-in needed to advance policy recommendations.

In our recent MAP 150 work with students through Students Speak Out, for example (see the July *Minnesota Journal*), students identified “boredom” as an important fact of life in high school. Boredom is also critical to understanding why students often tune out and drop out. Boredom speaks to the importance of purpose and of motivation in learning, but it is not among the topics we usually debate in education.

In another example, alternative school students involved in Students Speak Out identified a critical policy issue for those schools: Students are required to fail in mainstream schools before they are accepted into alternative programs. That policy actually promotes more student failure. This fact probably would have remained hidden if we had not involved these students as stakeholders and policy-makers.

Self-interest and common interest

Making policy in the tension between the good of the individual and the good of the whole is not without conflict. That is why we need to ground this work in a common set of civic and democratic principles that acknowledge, but rise above, our different individual and small-group interests. It is these shared values that bring people to the Citizens League.

I’m proud and honored by the work of past Citizens League leaders and participants. Their ability to find the common ground needed to work through competing self-interests on difficult issues has been the basis for our success and for Citizens League’s current mission and operating principles. They are the foundation for our future success, and of democracy itself. Self-interest shouldn’t be left “at the door.” Instead, enlightened self-interest may be our best doorway to innovative and implementable policy work in the future. ●

Sean Kershaw is the Executive Director of the Citizens League. He can be reached at skershaw@citizensleague.org.

POLICY REDUX

Sometimes it seems as if policy recommendations are made in one year and gone the next, replaced by a new set of discussions and policy priorities. But many of the reports and recommendations by Citizens League study committees have built on the work of previous committees.

In this month's Policy Redux feature, we take a look at the Citizens League's past work on aging and nursing home care.

Resolution on nursing home bill before the state

The resolution below was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Citizens League of Minneapolis and Hennepin County on February 15, 1957 and submitted to the Minnesota Legislature.

WHEREAS in its study of the care of chronically ill medically indigents of Minneapolis completed this year, the Citizens League found that:

1. the nursing home picture is far from satisfactory,
2. there is a clear need for additional beds for the chronically ill and the aged and this shortage is a major cause of substandard nursing home care,
3. solution of the nursing home problem for the medically indigent involves the State and Federal governments as well as the local governments,
4. public and other non-profit organizations are especially urged to establish homes for the aged and nursing homes, and

Proposal to restore to Minneapolis the rights to

Until 1953, the City of Minneapolis had the authority under its charter to license the operation of nursing homes within the city for the purpose of assuring that maintenance of minimum standards of health and nursing care and compliance with fire and building safety codes. In the 1953 Legislature, a special law was passed removing this licensing authority from the city and leaving nursing homes subject to licensing only by the state.

The city government attempted to cope with the maintenance of adequate standards in many ways, which resulted in acceptable standards within the majority of nursing homes. In 1958, moreover, the city health commissioner acted as agent of the State Board of Health, and was able to make remarkable progress in improving nursing care

New wrinkle on aging: Baby steps to 2030 (1998)

Demographics paint a clear picture of Minnesota's future: a huge number of baby boomers are moving toward older age. By 2030, the number of people over the age of 65 is expected to double, from 592,000 in 2000 to 1,173,000. What's more, the number of people under the age of 65 is expected to actually decline slightly.

The following are the three main focuses of the report:

Life cycle communities

Designing neighborhoods and cities that are sensitive to, and provide for the needs and wants of all people.

Communities in 2030 will:

- be truly livable for all age groups
- support the ability of older people to live independently longer
- offer a wide variety of volunteer and social interaction opportunities for all community residents

Recommendations

The Department of Housing, Finance, Minnesota Planning, other state agencies, for-profit and nonprofit building industries, housing associations and housing advocates must work diligently with local municipalities on reworking zoning ordinances and other land use regulations that generate persistent low-density, single-use, auto-oriented development. In its place, municipalities should move toward a flexible land-use pattern that integrates different uses, housing types, and income levels.

Workforce

Utilizing the various talents and abilities of older people to the mutual benefit of society and older people themselves.

The workplace of 2030 will:

- not limit "work" by age, but by hard and soft skills and individual motivation
- follow a new, redefined concept of retirement not determined by an arbitrarily designated age, but by mental and physical capacity and personal financial preparation
- be notable for its flexibility and ready access to training and life-long learning; as such, traditional retirement will give way to new stages of personal and career developments

Legislature (1957) Submitted to the Minnesota Legislature

WHEREAS after long deliberation and numerous public hearings, the Legislative Interim Public Welfare Commission has prepared a draft of a bill which would:

1. Appropriate \$2,000,000 of State funds for the purpose of granting aids on a matching basis to local governments or non-profit corporations to be used in the construction of new nursing homes or homes for the aged, and for expansion, remodeling, and conversion of existing homes;
2. Establish adequate machinery and procedures to assure distribution of the aid grants so as to meet the state-wide needs equitably;
3. Finance the grants from certificate of indebtedness, the principal and interest of which are to be paid from a property tax levy during the years 1961 to 1970, inclusively; and

WHEREAS the Citizens League considers this bill will be a step toward meeting the nursing home needs in Minneapolis above outlined, as well as those of the entire state;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Citizens League endorse the bill and urge our elected representatives in the Legislature from Hennepin County to work for and support its passage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, if this bill is enacted into law, the State Board of Health be urged in considering applicants for grants to give first priority to nursing home applications, and encourage groups interested in establishing homes for the aged to avail themselves of the provisions of section 207, Federal Housing Authority Act, which provides special assistance to non-profit organizations in financing the construction of housing facilities for the aged.

regulate nursing homes (1959)

in the nursing homes through an educational and surveillance program financed in large part by federal funds passed on by the state Department of Health.

It was therefore recommended that the Citizens League Board of Directors urge the Minneapolis City Council and the Hennepin County legislative delegation to work for repeal of the 1953 statute which took away the above stated authority (Laws of Minnesota 1953, Sec. 2, Chapter 466. Rest Homes, Nursing Homes).

The Health, Hospitals and Welfare Committee therefore further recommended that the city provide adequate finances for health, building, and fire inspectors assigned to nursing home regulation. Furthermore, the following was suggested:

1. That license fees be high enough to cover the cost of regulating the nursing homes.
2. That provisions be made to charge the costs of repeated call-back inspections and all other comparable costs against the home occasioning such expenses.
3. That a combined city-state license be used, with the state deputizing the city health and fire department for overseeing compliance with state regulations, and that the state reimburse the city for a fair share of the cost of regulations in recognition of the fact that the city is helping to provide a service which is provided directly by state personnel in other parts of the state.
4. That the state be asked to continue the grant of federal money for the successful educational program begun in 1958 in the health department.

Recommendations

1. The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Legislature should lobby Congress to revise eligibility for Social Security, creating new standards based on mental and physical capacity and financial criteria.
2. The state Legislature, with assistance from the state departments of Human Services, Economic Security, Labor and Industry, Finance, and Revenue, must link income policy more closely with labor policy.
3. Overcome barriers to greater participation of older people in the workforce, particularly for part-time, temporary, seasonal and consultative positions—staples in the work lives of older people of 2030.
4. Municipalities, with the assistance of the Department of Economic Security and Workforce Centers throughout the state, should link traditional senior services and programming at the local level with job and volunteer information resources and referral services.
5. New efforts must be taken to recognize, encourage and reward productivity in all its forms, whether paid or unpaid.

Long-term care

Providing support, care and other services to older people in order to improve their quality of life.

- Long-term care in 2030 will have shifted toward "functional wellness" and improved quality of life for dependant persons—in essence, into a long-term support system.
- By 2030, people will be empowered to take responsibility for their own "self-care," having greater choice and access to a menu of flexible, individually-controlled services, rather than the fixed, place-based service system common today.
- Changes in how society views death and related "end of life" issues by the end of the year in 2030 will be embodied in the newly designed long-term support system, whereby public resources will be used to enhance the quality of life of older people rather than focusing almost exclusively on extending life.
- In 2030, older people will have guaranteed access to universal, "buy-in" coverage for long-term support based in income.
- Long-term support in 2030 will have evolved to meet the many different needs to a diverse population.

Recommendations

1. The state Legislature and DHS, in partnership with healthcare providers, should lobby Congress to experiment with a significant shift in Medicare spending toward preventative care and self-care, and away from acute episodic care.
2. DHS should use small- and large-scale demonstrations to start or continue testing delivery mechanisms that give participants choice in care providers and in specific long-term support services offered.
3. DHS, the state Department of Health and Area Agencies on Aging (among others) should explore ways to compress the overwhelming scope and complexity of service options and organizations that older people must wade through when seeking care and/or support services.
4. The Legislature should rationalize the regulatory framework of the health care and long-term care systems now in place, clarifying and simplifying the payment streams and making service delivery more flexible.
5. The Legislature should investigate the state of Oregon's model for "end-of-life" caregiving, and begin customizing (in law) such a model for Minnesota, paying particular attention to include strong patient rights and medical self-directives.
6. The Department of Health should analyze the costs of chronic care, and do a "best practices" study regarding the treatment of different types of chronic care, particularly non-fatal chronic conditions, and their related costs. The goal should be to improve the long- and short-term quality of life of those suffering from chronic conditions, and to do so in a cost-efficient way.
7. DHS should advocate for and track public policies, including taxes, that encourage long-term self-sufficiency and well-being.
8. DHS and the Department of Health should help fund "self-care" education and training programs, public education and awareness campaigns, and a campaign for better financial planning for long-term care and support.
9. Long-term care organizations and their industry associations, aided by DHS, the Department of Health, and Area Agencies on Aging (among others), should make a concerted effort to recruit, educate and train more people from a variety of cultures and races to better serve the individual needs of a diversifying aging population.

Civic engagement

continued from page 1

- The participants were selected to provide broad and varied views on aging services. They included seniors, home caregivers, professional caregivers, policy-makers, non-profit administrators and service providers, government officials, and financial experts. Collectively, they brought all the needed expertise to the table so that they could learn from one another throughout the workshop (bypassing the typical expert presentations as the means of “educating” participants).
- The entire workshop was dedicated to participants’ work. There were no briefing books or presentations to educate people about the issue. The only advance material they received was a two-page description of the three topics the workshop would address: home care, public financing and senior-friendly communities.
- The workshop was broken into two half-day sessions—an afternoon and the following morning. We were operating on a hunch that an evening break provides an important time for reflection during such an intensive process, and fosters breakthroughs in thinking. Judging from the difference between the ideas offered at the end of the first afternoon and those offered the following morning, the break seems to have worked as intended.
- At the end of both of the half-day sessions, participants reported to a panel for feedback. The panel included Kathryn Roberts, CEO of Ecumen, state Representative Paul Thissen, chair of the House Health and Human Services Policy Committee, and LaRhae Knatterud of the Department of Human Services, well known for her excellent contributions to the field of long-term care. The purpose of the panel was to show participants that their work mattered—each of the panelists is in a key position to support follow-up work, as well as to create a feedback loop that made reporting out more realistic.

Was the workshop meaningful?

According to the criteria above, a process is meaningful if participants feel it’s worth their time and it produces usable results. I’ll discuss the results first.

At the end of the second half day, participants presented six ideas they had worked out that morning. These included:

Communities for a Lifetime

Minnesota communities could become certified “communities for a lifetime” based on the services they provide and community design. Communities would be rated by categories, such as transportation, housing, workforce, technology, and infrastructure.

The emphasis would be on multi-functional services and resources that accommodate residents at different life stages (for example, a school bus used to transport children during the day could transport seniors to activities and outings on weekends). A certifying agency would provide guidance and toolkits showcasing best practices.

Communities could define themselves individually, regionally, or in partnership with other communities, according to how they chose to collaborate (or not) on the services they provide.

Communities would be encouraged to involve public, private, and nonprofit sectors, and to merge services to increase efficiency.

Every Minnesotan a Millionaire

Every Minnesotan a Millionaire would create a system to help people save through a mandatory payroll deduction similar to current income tax or voluntary retirement plan withholdings. The state would match contributions for earners under a specified income, much like an employer retirement fund matching program. Contributions would be tax exempt, and unused funds could be passed tax-free to other family members. To access their funds, participants would be required to submit a sound financial plan that specified a schedule for use (medical care, living expenses, etc.), and include a reserve for end-of-life care (the last two years of life are the most expensive in terms of healthcare).

By asking people to create their own life plans tailored to their individual needs, this plan assumes that people can be trusted to make good choices for themselves and don’t need to be forced to subscribe to a pre-subscribed formula or plan.

Communities for a Lifetime: Creating communities that are senior friendly, but that are also adaptable and reusable as demographics change.

You Give, You Get: Based on the idea of re-instilling personal responsibility and mutual help, this concept includes a bank where people “deposit” their volunteer efforts which then can be redeemed for services, discounts, and exclusive events.

Every Minnesotan a Millionaire: Mandatory payroll deductions and a limited government match to ensure that all Minnesotans can afford retirement.

Americare: Combining financing for health care, social security, and long-term care into a single person-centered product. Unused savings can be banked for use toward later life care.

Company Wonderful: A social service organization that uses models from innovative companies to recruit, retain, and support employees—including seniors of retirement age.

Keep Truckin': Incentives to continue to work between ages 62 and 67 while drawing Social Security.

Two things stand out about these ideas. First, participants generally agreed that the issues confronting Minnesota as the population ages do not stem so much from the impact of demographic change itself as from the way we have structured the use of resources in the past. The low U.S. savings rate is a tremendous issue, and not just for seniors. Land and housing use

must become much more multi-purpose and flexible because we cannot afford to do otherwise.

Second, the recommendations don’t tinker with the existing systems by proposing ideas such as rule changes as much as they rethink existing systems. They fundamentally recognize that the so-called “social compact” must change: most people will probably need to work longer and thus our practices of “work” must change, as well as our beliefs about personal responsibility, and our collective use of scarce resources.

What did participants think of the workshop?

Because the workshop was experimental in nature, the participants’ evaluations were especially important. We also limited the number of participants to about 45. Of those who responded:

- 87% said they were given ample opportunity to contribute.
- 87% said that their group had the collective expertise to complete their assignment successfully.
- 73% said they gained new insights related to aging.
- 93% said they felt that their participation made a valuable contribution to the results.
- 60% felt that the results will have some meaningful impact on how Minnesota addresses aging (only 7% disagreed and the rest were neutral).
- 67% felt that policy would be more effective if developed through this type of workshop (only 7% disagreed).

continued on page 7

TAKE NOTE

Innovative Policy Initiatives From Around the World

Reduced commute times and fewer stops a the pump

Improving signal management, monitoring, and operation improves traffic flow and saves energy

by Jim Horan

On my ride to work in the morning, I pass a line of cars, pause briefly at the intersection, glance at the red light, look both ways, and start peddling again. This five second ritual gets me past dozens of cars patiently waiting at a traffic signal that could have long since turned green. A recent U.S. Department of Transportation study found that improper traffic signal timing accounts for 5 to 10 percent of all traffic delays. This seemingly small percentage adds up, causing an estimated 300 million hours of delay on major road ways every year.

The National Traffic Signal Operations Coalition (NTSOC), made up of transportation experts, issues a report card every other year grading the nation's cities on traffic flow. The report card helps cities take a closer look at how they manage traffic flow and recommends ways to improve flow by adjusting traffic management and monitoring, signal operation, timing, and maintenance.

In 2005, for example, after NTSOC gave Plano, Texas a "C", city officials went to work adjusting the timing of lights, increasing enforcement, and making other minor changes. The work paid off. In 2006, NTSOC gave Plano a "B". The changes also saved an estimated 850,000 gallons of gas, eliminated 36 million unnecessary stops, and cut 745,000 hours of commuter delays.

Flow like a river or run like a train?

The University of Virginia is developing a

technology-based solution to traffic congestion. According to researchers there, current traffic control technology views traffic as a sort of flowing river, and adjusts the flow using timer-based lights. Now the Virginia team has developed a computer program that looks at traffic as a collection of individuals. The program takes into account slow moving trucks, aggressive drivers, lane changers, and other driving variables, allowing researchers to create an individualized system for each intersection. The intent is to create a comprehensive view of traffic flow that models virtually every vehicle on the road and restructure traffic flow so that it moves uniformly through traffic signals "like a train."

Upkeep and enforcement key

The recent NTSOC report notes that while improving the timing of traffic lights is important, cities also need to commit to enforcing traffic rules and improving maintenance. Better compliance by drivers allows the computer program to better gauge, direct, and time traffic flow.

After Austin, Texas received a "C" from the NTSOC, the city began proactively checking every traffic light and implementing a regular maintenance schedule. These changes earned Austin an "A" in the most recent NTSOC report, cut Austin's maintenance calls in half, and significantly decreased commute times for drivers.

Cost savings from improved timing, enforcement, and maintenance could end up cutting fuel consumption nationwide by 10 percent (a commuter savings of nearly 30 gallons per year), according to the NTSOC. Perhaps even more important to drivers, improved traffic flow could substantial cut time from already long commutes. Some recent studies by the University of Virginia, pegged time savings for individual drivers at nearly 40 hours per year.

While a nationwide implementation of the NTSOC recommendations seems far off, cities can make the adjustments easily and reap a potentially huge return on their investment. The Center for Advanced Transportation Technology and the University of Maryland estimate that the maximum total cost to a city that adopts the NTSOC recommendations at \$1,000 per intersection. Alternatively the city could implement only a few of the NTSOC adjustments (as Plano did) to improve its overall traffic flow. Given long commutes and high gas prices, reworking an outdated system to function better could yield some immediate results. ●

Jim Horan is the Citizens League's water policy intern.

For more information on the NTSOC see:
www.ntoctalks.com

University of Virginia Program:
www.cts.virginia.edu/facilities_tol.htm

University of Maryland Program:
www.mdt2center.umd.edu/index.php

Civic engagement

continued from page 6

Next steps

One way to judge whether the workshop produced usable results is whether it generates follow-up activities. Seniors who attended the workshop presented the findings to fellow residents. They all expressed interest in being updated on the next steps in the process and the progress made, and expressed an interest in participating further.

The Citizens League has been asked to present the workshop's findings at a number of community events. The workshop has served as a catalyst for discussions about how others might build off the work of the workshop and how the Citizens League might be involved in a phase II effort. Finally, we received several offers for participation in future events.

I'd like to say a word of thanks to Ecumen, which sponsored the workshop. Ecumen gave the Citizens League complete freedom to conduct the workshop as it wanted, never exerting influence over content or process. At the same time, Ecumen repeatedly provided logistical help that contributed to the workshop's success. ●

Stacy Becker is the MAP 150 Project Director.

9/2 Policy and a Pint®: Youth and Politics

As the Republican National Convention takes place across town, we'll ask how young people today are changing politics, elections, and public discourse.

The Policy and a Pint® Election Year Series is presented by the Citizens League and 89.3 The Current and is sponsored by Best Buy.

9/23 Regional Policy Workshop

This is no ordinary conference! Join us in a day of hard work and thought-provoking conversations to help build a new regional consensus. Together, we'll frame the key issues that the region needs to address and agree on next steps we can take.

Registration is \$25 for Citizens League members, \$75 for non-members. **Become a member of Citizens League for as low as \$25 and save \$50 on registration!**

For more information and to register, go to www.citizensleague.org

PERIODICALS



555 North Wabasha Street, Suite 240
St. Paul, MN 55102

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Minnesota Journal,
555 North Wabasha St., Suite 240, St. Paul, MN 55102.

above address.

Orders may be placed at (651) 293-0575 or by mail at the
Annual subscription rate for nonmembers is \$25 for 11 issues.

and additional offices.

11 times a year. Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN

positions on policy questions. The Journal is published

perspectives and do not necessarily reflect Citizens League

Articles and commentary are drawn from a broad range of

Website: www.citizensleague.org. Kathy Mock, chair.

Fax: (651) 293-0576. E-mail: info@citizensleague.org.

Suite 240, St. Paul, MN 55102. Phone: (651) 293-0575.

public affairs organization, 555 North Wabasha St.,

of the Citizens League, a nonprofit nonpartisan Twin Cities

The Minnesota Journal (ISSN 0741-9449) is a publication

Managing Editors – Bob DeBoer and Victoria Ford

Editor – J. Trout Lowen

Publisher – Sean Kershaw

The Minnesota Journal