

**Leeway Overlee (LO) Civic Association (CA)**  
**Minutes of General Membership Meeting**  
Wednesday, January 23, 2019 – 7:30pm,  
Westover Library Meeting Room #3, 1644 N McKinley Rd.

1. Leeway Overlee CA President Jack Grimaldi welcomed attendees and requested **reports** from officers. Ladd Connell, LOCA Secretary, summarized the minutes of the prior general membership meeting, held October 15, at which Delegate Patrick Hope was the featured speaker. LOCA Treasurer Jenni Michener reported starting balance of \$1179.09 and an ending (current) balance of \$689.18, a decline of \$489.91 as expenses for newsletter printing, Lee Highway Alliance contribution, Arlington County Civic Federation dues, etc. exceeded CA dues received of \$109.41.

2. Neighborhood Conservation (NC) Advisory Committee (AC) representative Rob Swennes provided an **update on the NC program**. He noted that the NC program was being reviewed for the first time in its existence. At the same time, the NC bond funding has been cut from \$12 million to \$5 million for the two-year bond period. The number of projects has fallen from a previous range of 17-20 every two years to only five in the current year. The NCAC will present the NC program to the County Board to advocate for its value to the community. Tom Wolfe, LOCA Liaison to the **Lee Highway Alliance**, provided an update on LHA's work, including the festival of lights held the evening of December 1. Mr. Wolfe also reported on the Plan Lee Highway<sup>i</sup> process and encouraged residents to attend a community kick-off on Feb. 19 at Washington-Lee High School.

### **Re-Districting Reform in Virginia**

3. Mr. Grimaldi then introduced Charlie Deal, the featured speaker, to discuss re-districting reform in Virginia on behalf of One Virginia 2021, an advocacy organization for which he leads efforts in Arlington. Mr. Deal noted the long history of gerrymandering in Virginia, reflected in Patrick Henry's efforts to keep James Madison from winning a seat in Congress in 1788.<sup>ii</sup> More recently in Virginia, in 2011 Republicans had gerrymandered the Congressional and Virginia House Districts, while the Democrats had gerrymandered the Virginia Senate. One Virginia 2021 is seeking to assure that such gerrymandering is not allowed in the re-districting that will decide districts to be used beginning in 2021.

4. Mr. Deal presented the case for reform, noting how representation outcomes could vary significantly depending on how voters of different political leanings are divided up. The goal of One Virginia 2021 is for re-districting to be put permanently in the hands of an independent, non-partisan redistricting commission. However, he said, the bill preferred by OneVirginia2021, SJ274 (Hanger-Locke), had been killed in the Senate Privileges and Elections Committee the day before (January 22). Fortunately, several other measures passed through to the full Senate – including SJ306 (Barker-Saslaw), which includes many of the provisions found in OneVirginia2021's proposed amendment, such as:

- It proposes a constitutional amendment, and not simply a law that could be undone;
- The redistricting commission includes eight citizen members, including the chair;
- The citizen selection process is identical to the one outlined in SJ274;
- It prohibits the General Assembly from amending the final map; and

- A final commission vote requires 12 of 16 members, preventing one faction or party from colluding.

For context, one of the main differences in SJ306 is that the redistricting commission is comprised of 8 citizens and 8 legislators.<sup>iii</sup> If passed, this amendment could significantly change the way districts are drawn in Virginia, and OneVirginia2021 looks forward to working with members of both parties in the General Assembly to make sure significant reforms are passed this year. As the bill is considered in the full Senate, OneVirginia2021 is strongly urging lawmakers to include provisions about full transparency and clear rules that prohibit gerrymandering. Specifically, OneVirginia2021 is advocating districts that are 1) compact, contiguous, and near-equal in population; comply with the Voting Rights Act; not favor any political party; and aligned with local political (community/city/county) boundaries.

5. **Q&A:** Mr. Deal then answered questions. Asked about the idea of districts respecting local political boundaries, he explained that current boundaries cut across communities. Such gerrymandered boundaries make it difficult to represent a district, because of lack of cohesion among issues that people in the district have. Districts should relate to municipal or county boundaries. Concerning advocacy going forward, Mr. Deal said that the key issues are to ensure that the proposed amendment include transparency and not favor political parties. This requires close monitoring of the final text –to see what in fact emerges if amendments are made.

6. A resident noted that the proposed commission is only half politicians, half citizens, so one could argue that an alternative process would do re-districting better. The proposed process was crafted by a politician who was opposing redistricting reform, thus one could suspect politicians will control it. Was there reason for optimism? Mr. Deal replied that, indeed, the proposal now going forward doesn't require the commission members to be non-partisan or bi-partisan. The prior option would have had an open process to establish pool of potential members– more like a jury selection process. Under the Saslaw bill, there could be 12 partisan members, and only four non-partisan, because of the eight citizen members, half would be partisan.<sup>iv</sup>

7. Another resident asked what would happen if the commission ended up with gridlock, i.e. no agreement on new maps. Mr. Deal said that if the commission reached no decision, the re-districting would go to the courts. Asked about the current Supreme Court challenge, Mr. Deal noted that it only applies to a fraction of the districts, and the districts re-drawn would only last till 2021. Asked if this represented progress, Mr. Deal acknowledged that it did, but the re-districting cycle is 10 years long, thus the focus on that effort. Asked about other options, Mr. Deal noted a “nuclear option,” which would involve having the Governor carry out the steps in the proposed amendment, i.e. setting up an independent commission, drawing maps in a public process, etc. Governor Northam has supported the legislative process, saying he will veto any gerrymandered maps. The other possibility is out-of-cycle re-districting. Concerning the role of One Virginia 2021, Mr. Deal explained that it was formed four years ago, has three paid employees, including its

Executive Director, working in Richmond, and local action groups around the state, which have a conference call every Friday evening to coordinate action. It is non-partisan.

8. The meeting adjourned following the Q&A at approximately 8:45 p.m.

Submitted by:  
Ladd Connell, Secretary

<sup>i</sup> Visit <https://projects.arlingtonva.us/plans-studies/land-use/lee-highway> for more info.

<sup>ii</sup> See “The [First Gerrymander?](#): Patrick Henry, James Madison, James Monroe, and Virginia's 1788 Congressional Districting,” by [Thomas Rogers Hunter](#) in [Early American Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal](#), University of Pennsylvania Press, Volume 9, Number 3, Fall 2011, pp. 781-82. Ironically, when Madison became President in 1809, he had Elbridge Gerry as his Vice President.

<sup>iii</sup> According to [One Virginia 2021](#), other differences between SJ306 and SJ274 are:

- The number of commission members is 16 instead of 10;
- Commission members are split between citizens and legislators (8 of each);
- Legislature is given authority to approve or reject the commission’s final map;
- It lacks specific provisions prohibiting gerrymandering; and
- It does not require meetings to be fully transparent.

<sup>iv</sup> Associated Press’s Alan Suderman reported from Richmond that the Virginia General Assembly on Saturday [February 23, 2019] approved an

“overhaul of how legislative and congressional maps are drawn. The House and Senate approved a proposed constitutional amendment that would create a new commission empowered to draw legislative and congressional maps during the next redistricting process in 2021, a change from the current practice of lawmakers drawing the maps themselves. The measure must be approved again by the General Assembly next year, and then by voters, to take effect.

“The 16-member commission would be a mix of lawmakers and citizens. Republicans and Democrats would be evenly split among the lawmakers and the citizen members would be picked by retired judges from a list drawn up by lawmakers. A super-majority of both citizen and lawmakers commission members would be needed to present a map to the General Assembly for consideration.

“The General Assembly would have to vote up or down on any proposed maps. In the event of a stalemate, the Virginia Supreme Court would draw the maps. Governors would have no role in the process. Under current law, governors have veto power over any map proposed by the legislature. Advocates of redistricting reform hailed the proposal’s passage.”

Meanwhile, [OneVirginia2021](#) [reported](#) [2/23/19] that the Virginia General Assembly approved a compromise proposal of HJ615 (Cole) and SJ306 (Barker) that reconciled both proposed redistricting commission amendments to the Virginia Constitution to reform how Virginia’s districts are drawn after the 2020 Census and beyond.

“Although this bipartisan plan does not reflect every provision we urged in our original proposal, make no mistake: This reform will end partisan gerrymandering in Virginia. We are particularly gratified that the General Assembly adopted language that requires the commission to do its work in full public view and follow clear rules that keep our communities together.

“ABOUT THE COMPROMISE PROPOSAL

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“The compromise shares a number of substantive provisions found in the House plan, Senate plan and SJ274, a bipartisan proposal drafted with the help of OneVirginia2021’s Citizens’ Constitutional Amendment Drafting Committee.

“Here are key elements in the reform passed by the House of Delegates and the Senate on Saturday:

- Establishes a redistricting commission of 8 legislators and 8 citizens, with a citizen serving as chair;
- Requires full transparency of all meetings, minutes and data;
- Includes specific protections for minority communities;
- Includes impartial review in the selection of citizen members of the commission;
- Excludes unelected congressional or general assembly employees from the commission;
- Guards against partisan gerrymandering by requiring a supermajority of commissioners for approval of district maps;
- Provides the general assembly only up-or-down votes on the commission’s maps, without amendments;
- Excludes the Governor from the approval process, which would throw off the balance created by the above framework.