

A LOCAL INITIATIVE SPONSORED BY:  
 Southwest Citizens for Civic Engagement, Southwest  
 Community Education  
 and 

# Getting to the bottom of the ballot

## A New Guide to Local and State

# 4

**C**learly, something is missing in the public process of informing and motivating voters; local elections rarely receive even 50% voter participation. Southwest Citizens for Civic Engagement is a newly formed group of neighbors bringing a variety of solutions to this challenging problem.

In addition to hosting two candidate gatherings and sponsoring local issues seminars in the coming year, we and our co-sponsors present this new version of the traditional election guide—one that reveals nothing about the candidates (we'll all get plenty of candidate information by November) and much about the jobs they seek (duties, salary, etc).

### Letter from Don and Arvonne Fraser

Democracy begins with you, the voter. Not voting is a choice. You let others decide what kind of schools, roads, parks, libraries or taxes you get. A friend of ours once ran for the park board and lost by four votes. What bothered him most were his friends and neighbors who said: "If I'd known it would be so close, I'd have voted." So take a little time to learn who's running for what, what they believe in and whether you think they can make tough decisions.

Voters have more power than you think. Often only 10 or 15% of the potential voters actually vote in local elections or for candidates at the bottom of the ballot. So be one of the decision-makers. Even if your candidate doesn't win, engaging in politics makes for good conversation and an interesting life.

—Don and Arvonne Fraser

Engaging in politics brought Arvonne and Don Fraser together in 1948. Since then, Donald M. Fraser has served as a state senator, congressman (1963-1978) and mayor of Minneapolis (1980 - 1993). Arvonne Fraser is a senior fellow emerita, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, and ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor with St. Paul Mayor George Latimer in 1986. Interesting lives, indeed!

Let it help you vote to the bottom of the ballot with intent this election!

"Interview" the candidates who've thrown their hats in the ring...

### Night-Before-the-Primary Party

Meet local primary candidates at an old-time political social. This is a casual opportunity for you and your neighbors to enjoy a rootbeer float and chat with active community members aspiring to elected office.

Monday, September 9th  
7pm to 9pm

### General Election Candidates Fair

Candidates in all the elections, from School Board to U.S. Senate, will be invited to participate in this community dialogue and celebration of democracy.

Thursday, October 17th  
7pm to 9pm

Both events held at

Lake Harriet Community School Upper Campus (50th and Washburn Ave. S.)

Ballot Box Commentary from Neighbors

"I find myself voting by sign. Last year, I knew one of the Library Board candidates and I voted for another one based on my politically savvy neighbor's lawn sign. Unfortunately, I didn't select any other candidates because I couldn't recognize the names from any of my other neighbors' yard signs."

—Madalyn Cioci, Linden Hills

"When I vote for judges, I always choose the women. I figure when it comes to judges, less testosterone is better."

—Katie Murphy, Armatage

## CITY

**Job Title:** Mayor of Minneapolis**Salary:** \$88,000 annually**Term:** 4 years**Annual Budget Oversight:** \$1.25 Billion  
(Budget oversight duty is shared with Minneapolis City Council)**Duties:**

- Serves as executive officer of the City of Minneapolis
- Serves as spokesperson for the City of Minneapolis at the state legislature and with other regional, state, and national governments
- Presides over Executive Committee which conducts annual performance reviews and negotiates city contracts
- Proposes policy direction through use of the "bully pulpit", e.g. the annual State of the City address
- Proposes annual operating and capital budgets to the City Council
- Reviews and approves or vetoes all City Council and Park Board actions
- Signs all City contracts
- Appoints representatives to a variety of agencies and commissions, such as Planning Commission and Metropolitan Airport Commission
- Nominates department head candidates for Executive Committee and Council approval

**Case-in-Point:****Property Tax Policy Revised**

Our current Mayor, R.T. Rybak, and a majority on the City Council are leading the charge to create new policy that will lead to a more balanced tax and revenue structure over the long term. Current projections for 2001 suggest that property taxes will increase significantly for homeowners in Minneapolis if the tax and revenue system remains unchecked. For example, a property owner currently paying \$900 in city tax would, according to these projections, see an increase of 222% to \$2,900 and a property owner paying \$100 in city tax would see an increase of 900% to \$1,000. In light of these projections, the Mayor and Council voted in 2002 to impose an annual limit on tax levy increases for all city operations, including the Park and Library Board, and they created a budgeting system where revenues are determined prior to setting expenses. The Board of Taxation and Estimation, as the official jurisdiction for tax policy, voted to approve the Mayor and Council plan for this tax levy limit. For Minneapolis residents, this means less severe property tax increases over the next 8 years.

**Job Title:** Minneapolis City Council Member (one of 13 board members)**Salary:** \$65,678 annually**Term:** 4 years**Annual Budget Oversight:** \$1.25 Billion (Budget oversight duty is shared with Mayor)**Duties:**

- Governs Minneapolis through legislative, administrative, and financial power over many City functions
- Levies taxes and passes on assessments to property owners
- Enacts ordinances and resolutions in order to regulate public and private activities, control use of property, prevent crime and generally ensure public health and welfare
- Oversees licensing of businesses in Minneapolis
- Exercises budgetary and policy control over City departments
- Represents the interests of his or her constituents by responding to inquiries, suggestions and complaints regarding City programs and services
- Meets with constituents to discuss land developments affecting the ward that they represent and the City as a whole
- Oversees city elections
- Elects City Council officers, including the Council President, who acts as mayor if the Mayor is out of town or incapacitated

**Job Title:** Board of Estimation and Taxation Elected Member

(Board comprised of the Mayor or designate, City Council President, Ways and Means Committee Chair, Commissioner of the Park and Recreation Board, trustee of the Library Board and two members elected city-wide)

**Salary:** \$35 per meeting payment**Term:** 4 years**Annual Budget Oversight:** No direct oversight**Duties:**

- Holds public hearings to obtain citizen input on setting the maximum tax levies for certain tax funds in the City
- Helps establish overall debt management policy for the City
- Issues General Obligation Bonds of the City in support of the Capital Program
- Reviews selected City department budgets and, after receiving recommendations from the Mayor and City Council, sets maximum tax levies for the following funds:

City Council General Fund  
Permanent Improvement Fund

Police Personnel Fund  
Park and Recreation Fund  
Tree Preservation and Reforestation Fund  
Park Rehabilitation and Parkway Maintenance Fund  
Shade Tree Disease Fund  
Lake Pollution Control Fund  
Library General Fund  
Public Housing Fund  
Estimate and Taxation Fund

## COUNTY OFFICES

**Job Title:** Hennepin County Commissioner (one of 7 board members)

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On the ballot this fall

**Salary:** \$81,816 annually**Term:** 4 years**Annual budget oversight:** \$1.69

Billion in 2002

**Duties:**

The Hennepin County Board of Commissioners oversees the following county services:

- Commercial, industrial and residential property assessment and mapping
- County Children, Families and Adult Services, including child protection, foster care, services for adults and children with disabilities, mental health or chemical dependency
- Community Corrections, including adult and juvenile detention facilities and probation services
- Community Health, including community-based services for the elderly, disabled, and chronically ill, community health promotion, disease and injury prevention, communicable diseases, environmental and public health, and immunizations

- District Court, including civil, criminal and family courts
- Economic Assistance, Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), emergency shelter, Medical Assistance/Managed health care, General Assistance, Social Security Insurance (SSI), Food Stamps, child support collections

**Case in Point:**  
**Rethinking Transportation Planning**

Commissioner Gail Dorfman, the current commissioner representing southwest Minneapolis, has advocated for transportation initiatives that rethink transportation planning and focus on building and maintaining healthy communities. In Southwest, Commissioner Dorfman has been involved in the planning of the 50th Street traffic test at the request of neighborhoods and in partnership with City of Minneapolis traffic engineers. She has also been actively involved with the I-35W Project Advisory Committee and the Crosstown 62 Advisory Committee to ensure that neighborhood voices are heard in the process and that transportation projects link people with jobs and affordable housing. In addition, she has worked with the Midtown Greenway Coalition to develop the corridor for transit use and green space, and has helped to return Lyndale Avenue to the County's Capital Improvement Plan, in the process, revitalizing neighborhood interest in implementation of the Lyndale Avenue Task Force report recommendations.

- Environmental Services, including solid waste, recycling, waste reduction, lake and wetland improvement, hazardous waste and household hazardous waste disposal, and HERC (garbage burner in Minneapolis)
- Hennepin County Library system in suburban Hennepin County
- Hennepin County Medical Center and Medical Examiner
- Transportation, including highway (county roads) operation and maintenance, and highway (county roads) design, planning and construction projects
- Emergency Preparedness

**Job Title:** County Attorney

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On the ballot this fall

**Salary:** \$114,287 annually**Term:** 4 years**Annual Budget Oversight:** \$31.5 Million**Duties:**

- Serves as chief prosecutor of all adult felony and juvenile crimes in Hennepin County
- Provides legal counsel to the Board of Commissioners and

all county departments

- Represents the county government in civil lawsuits, child support matters and child protection actions.

**Case in Point:**  
**Community Prosecution Initiated**

In 1999, Hennepin County Attorney Amy Klobuchar initiated an innovative approach to crime-fighting called Community Prosecution. This approach fosters a close working relationship between prosecutors and local neighborhoods and communities where higher rates of crime are occurring. Prosecutors are assigned to work with police, local residents, businesses and others in a specific geographic area to develop strategies for preventing and prosecuting crime. In addition, they collaborate to identify appropriate consequences for those who break the law. The result is a more community-focused approach to prosecution.

**Job Title:** County Sheriff

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On the ballot this fall

**Salary:** \$114,288**Term:** 4 years**Annual Budget Oversight:** \$54 Million**Duties:**

- Serves as Chief Law Enforcement Officer within the County (the only elected position in law enforcement)

- Provides law enforcement for communities that do not have a law enforcement structure

- Gives law enforcement support to communities, such as 24 hour enforcement

- Provides security for the county jail and court systems

- Operates special, highly trained units including K-9, Narcotics, Detectives, Crime Lab, and Warrants

- Provides specialized services and training to other law enforcement systems, such as 911 service

- Oversees nearly 750 licensed and civilian personnel

**Job Title:** Hennepin Conservation

## Job Title: Library Board Commissioner

(one of 8 board members, 6 elected at-large, 2 appointed by Mayor and Council)

**Salary:** \$7,200 annually (Board President receives \$8,400)

**Term:** 4 years for at-large elected members; 2 years for appointed members

**Annual Budget Oversight:** \$20 Million

### Duties:

- Oversees the establishment, management, and maintenance of public libraries in Minneapolis
- Levies a tax for the support of the library system
- Appoints the Director, who administers and coordinates the operation of the library system
- Approves the basic goals, objectives, policies, and principles for the Director to follow in operating the system

### Case in Point: Linden Hills Library Renovated

In order to increase space for the children's library and improve technology services provided by the library, extensive renovations at the Linden Hills Library were approved by the Library Board and completed in 2002.

## Job Title: Minneapolis Park Board Commissioner

(one of 9 board members, including 6 district representatives and 3 at-large members)

**Salary:** \$10,200 annually (Board President receives \$11,400)

**Term:** 4 years

**Annual Budget Oversight:** \$70.5 Million

### Duties:

- Maintains and develops the Minneapolis park system
- Enacts ordinances governing the use of neighborhood and regional parks, parkways, beaches, lakes, and special-use facilities such as pools, ice arenas and municipal golf courses
- Provides for recreational opportunities in Minneapolis
- Oversees maintenance of boulevard trees
- Manages policing of park properties
- Appoints a full time Superintendent, who appoints five Assistant Superintendents to head the Administration, Development, Recreation, Operations and Plan-

ning Divisions

• Manages through these structured divisions a staff of approximately 600 permanent employees as well as 1,500 part-time employees

### Case in Point: Protecting Water Quality of Minneapolis Lakes

The Park Board initiates water quality improvement projects to protect the lakes in Minneapolis. One such practice is to create wetland areas adjacent to lakes, e.g. the wetland at Xerxes Avenue South and Lake Calhoun Parkway and the wetland strips between the bike path and road along Lake Harriet Parkway. These wetlands hold and filter stormwater before it enters the lakes, and add valuable natural environments to the area.

## Getting to the bottom of the ballot

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## Job Title: Minneapolis School Board Member

(one of 7 board members)

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### On the ballot this fall

**Salary:** \$9,600 annually (Board Chair receives \$10,680)

**Term:** 4 years

**Annual Budget Oversight:** \$695.9 Million

### Duties:

- Sets policy for selecting the superintendent of the public schools
- Oversees the School District's budget, curriculum, personnel and facilities
- Sets goals for the district and monitors

implementation and results

- Facilitates outreach to parents and the community

### Case in Point: School Board Responds to Concerns of Families

To encourage families to enroll their children in the public school system, the School Board has taken the following actions: created K-8 schools to better meet middle school needs, expanded the popular IB program at Southwest High School, and supported the recent referendum to limit class size and maintain adequate funding in a difficult financial environment.

## STATE OFFICES

This section focus only on the less well-known State Offices

## District Supervisor

(one of 5 board members)

**Salary:** \$55 per diem rate, with a limit of one per day

**Term:** 4 years

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### On the ballot this fall

### Duties:

- Works with other local officials to encourage and support the implementation of conservation programs and practices
- Establishes conservation policies and program priorities for District staff
- Administers financial assistance for conservation programs for private landowners

### Case in Point: Wetland Health Assessment

The County Conservation District implemented a large-scale assessment project to review the health of county wetlands. Volunteers were trained to collect valuable data about our wetlands. Information from this study will be used to evaluate land use impact on wetlands and to set policy for protecting wetland systems.

## Job Title: Secretary of State

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### On the ballot this fall

**Salary:** \$66,168

**Term:** 4 years

**Annual Budget Oversight:** During the 1998-99 budgeting biennium, the Office collected approximately \$19 Million in fees and charges, and had spent approximately \$13 Million.

### Duties:

- Files and certifies the authenticity of a wide variety of official documents.
- Registers a variety of business organizations including corporations, assumed business names, banks, insurance companies, limited liability companies, limited liability partnerships, and limited partnerships
- Serves as chief election official in Minnesota and is responsible for administration of Minnesota election law.
- Chairs the State Canvassing Board (certifies the results of state elections).

### Case in Point:

#### Citizen Ambassador Program

The Secretary of State created a program to promote more active citizen involvement with elections. Citizen Ambassadors are trained to work within their own communities, to reach out to people from traditionally under-involved groups with the message that citizenship activities like voting and election judging are worthwhile and rewarding. In this capacity, they serve as citizen representatives of the Secretary of State.

## Job Title: State Auditor

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### On the ballot this fall

**Salary:** \$72,187

**Term:** 4 years

**Annual Budget Oversight:** Oversees accounting for 43 departments in the state

### Duties:

- Serves as a watchdog for Minnesota taxpayers by helping to ensure financial integrity, accountability, and cost-effectiveness of 4,300 Minnesota local governmental entities
- Reviews financial statements, documents, and reports submitted to the Office. For financial and legal accuracy.

### Case in Point:

#### Special Investigations Protect Taxpayer Interests

Investigations launched by the current State Auditor, Judy Dutcher, have uncovered government inefficiencies, conflicts of interest and taxpayer waste. In 2002, an investigation into the City of Brooklyn Park expenditures uncovered approximately \$200,000 in questionable spending for things such as employee parties, gifts, meals and golf outings from 1999 to 2001. The auditor made recommendations to the City for creating better expenditure standards, and continues to monitor the city's spending.

## Job Title: Attorney General

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### On the ballot this fall

**Salary:** \$ 93,980

**Term:** 4 years

**Annual Budget Oversight:** \$31.5 Million

### Duties:

- Serves as chief legal officer for the State of Minnesota representing and advising over 100 state agencies, boards and commissions, and the State in state and federal court
- Handles felony criminal appeals, advises local prosecutors in the conduct of criminal trials and handles cases at the request of local prosecutors
- Serves as chief policy maker and law enforcer in the areas of consumer protection, antitrust enforcement and charities' regulation
- Responsible for representing residential and small business utility consumers through participation in matters before the Public Utilities Commission

### Case in Point:

#### Report on Corporate Responsibility Released

The current Attorney General, Mike Hatch, released a report regarding the recent failures in corporate responsibility. This report contains a number of proposals intended to foster more sound corporate governance, including initiatives to strengthen professional, board, and management accountability.

# Need a Cure for Candidate Anxiety Disorder?



by Kathy Shea

I got lucky a few years back. In the course to serving as co-chair of the Slow Down on 50th Street campaign, I happened to meet my city councilperson, Barret Lane. It wasn't on my agenda to meet a locally elected official. I just started worrying away at a neighborhood problem, and presto, we're now friends.

Don't think I didn't learn my lesson: Get involved in local issues and you meet the folks who run things. And that's a good thing, to know the person representing you in City Hall. Why? You're probably thinking the "F" word—Favors. Nope, I'm thinking "V" for Voting.

Thanks to my new political connection, I learned how to vote nearly all the way down the ballot. It happened like this. While working on Barret's re-election campaign, I met candidates for Park Board, Library Board and School Board. While door-knocking with Barret, I began to get a slight handle on current city issues. By Election Day, I knew who I wanted to vote for nearly all the way down the ballot and why.

Now, I'm not uneducated about things political. I majored in Government, have a Masters Degree in Public Policy from the Humphrey Institute and O.D.ed on political campaign work in my younger days. It's just that I'd been busy raising kids and running a freelance writing business, and didn't feel articulate enough on city issues to frame a question. As a consequence, I began to suffer from what I call "Candidate Anxiety Disorder," and avoided exposure to local political candidates whenever possible. It wasn't pretty.

Occasionally, I'd see a candidate in the flesh

at a neighborhood festival or mingling with parents at a Park Board sporting event. I could spot them from across the t-ball field, maybe sporting a campaign button or t-shirt but always talking and listening with that ultra-intent, every-word-you-say-matters expression on their face.

I, of course, would never go up and start a conversation. Had I read the newspaper that day? Of course not. And I'm supposed to be the discriminating voter, the citizen watchdog keeping careful eye on what's happening to my tax dollars. Better to keep quiet, I'd reason, head in the other direction, and vow to read the Metro section forever after.

Most uncomfortable were the times when a candidate actually arrived at my door. One

\_\_\_\_\_."

Most sufferers of Candidate Anxiety Disorder know what to do in these situations. They respond to the candidate's pitch with a short series of responsive umms and uh-huhs, take the literature, and return inside. Did I take the easy way out? Never. (You see I also suffer from Democratic Guilt Syndrome.)

Disgraceful, I'd think, not to engage in intelligent conversation with a well-intentioned democratic participant offering political discourse! And so I'd dive in, struggling to ask a question or frame an opinion. Did it feel good? No. Did it feed my Candidate Anxiety Disorder? Yes. Did I try harder to avoid direct contact with political candidates? Definitely.

But, like I said, in a lucky move, I met my City Council person, stuck my big toe in the local political waters, and am cured—of Candidate Anxiety Disorder, anyway. My Democratic Guilt Syndrome, of course, is still alive and well. Why else would I write such an essay?

## "Candidate Anxiety Disorder" Cheat Sheets Available

If you are interested in meeting the candidates but aren't sure how to break the ice, don't worry. A "cheat sheet" will be available as you enter the upcoming Meet-the-Candidate Fairs which offers you a few relevant questions and hot-button issues

of several things could happen. I would be out in the side yard, notice his or her presence and tiptoe quietly to the backyard. Or I would spot the person from a window, listen to the dogs viciously sound the alarm and decide not to answer—too much hassle to calm them down, I'd tell myself.

On rare occasions, I'd open my door innocently, unaware that a candidate was on the other side. Of course, I'd never reveal my discomfort. The candidate, true to form, would take responsibility for starting things up: You know the routine ... "Hi, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ running for \_\_\_\_\_ in our ward/district, etc. Just coming out tonight to visit with neighbors and let you know

## Ballot Box Commentary from Neighbors

"I like to meet candidates and understand their reasons for running--what are their goals and why are they running? What will they do as an elected official? Then I vote for the candidate I feel has the best goals for a given office, relevant experience and the capability for doing a good job as an elected official. I vote for the candidate; not the party!"

—Mike Hohmann, Linden Hills

"I am a lifelong resident of the SW Mpls area, have a post graduate education, and am active in Church, school and neighborhood activities. I vote in each primary, local and national election. I did not grow up in a political family. It took me years to figure out the difference between democrats, republicans, DFLers and independents. Much to my chagrin I admit that each time there is an election I end up asking my dad, also a lifelong resident, who I should vote for and why (not that I always agree). I have never questioned the responsibilities of these positions and always convince myself that I will learn more by the next election but I never do!"

—Kris Schneider, Armatage

"I'm in the ballot box, two kids in tow, half way down the bewildering list of judges when my youngest says, "she has to go". Like now, right now, and I'm thinking, "I already filled in most of it....is it

Anderson or Andersen I wanted to remember...." Needless to say we bolted. I have to admit I never checked to see if that missed vote made the difference either."

—Blair Hartley, Fulton

"I like to think of myself as an educated voter, one who does my homework. I take the time to read much more about candidates than most people I know, but for many races there is little information available. On election day, I get to the bottom of the ballot, and I see names that never surfaced before that day. Those races aren't really covered in most media, so it's hard to learn what I want to know. I do recall one race where I did plan ahead--I knew I was voting against the judge candidate who inspired Jesse, Norm, and Skip to band together and condemn him. That's one of the few times one of those offices received media attention."

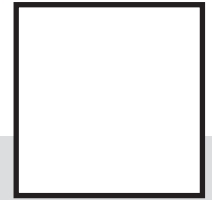
—David Weinlick, Armatage

"Throughout my voting life, I always stopped short on the ballot wherever the line was between partisan and non-partisan races. Without knowing more about individual candidates for the offices, my party of choice listed next to the candidate was my only criteria for voting. Before I began understanding offices and candidates, I would have had to rely on random selection to get to the bottom of

the ballot – that certainly didn't seem like a productive method."

—Michelle Mensing, Armatage

## Getting to the bottom of the ballot



The Getting to the Bottom of the Ballot initiative doesn't stop after the election. Watch for these upcoming events!

### Local Issues Seminars

In November 2002, through Southwest Community Education, Council Members, Scott Benson and Barret Lane, will be teaming up to bring residents "City Budgeting 101." This seminar will provide participants with details about the 2003 budget to be proposed by Mayor Rybak, as well as a glimpse at the process of projecting budget issues into the next 10 years. Understand how Minneapolis tax policy is set and where your local tax investment goes. Date, time, and location for this seminar will soon be announced.

Additional seminars and other forms of neighborhood discussion on local government issues are now being planned for Winter/Spring 2002.

### More Information?

If you would like more information about this project, would like to join the "Getting to the Bottom of the Ballot" email network, or to get involved with this effort, call the Fulton Neighborhood Line at (612) 922-3106 or email at [fulton@onvoymail.com](mailto:fulton@onvoymail.com).

This publication was researched and written by the following members of Southwest Citizen for Civic Engagement: Michelle Mensing, Kathy Shea, Jill Smith, and John Farrell. Resources include many city, county and state officials, personnel and websites. Thank you to all who contributed!

### Brought to you by:

Getting to the Bottom of the Ballot is organized by Southwest Citizens for Civic Engagement (SCCE), Southwest Journal, and Southwest Community Education. SCCE is a project of the Fulton Neighborhood Association in cooperation with a growing list of neighborhood organizations, including Linden Hills, Lynnhurst, Windom, Kenny, Armatage and Kingfield.