

Summary of Meeting with Marianne Curry and David Broden

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

Friday, June 6, 2008

Guest speakers: **Marianne Curry** and **David Broden**, volunteer consultants on the future of the Civic Caucus, both Civic Caucus electronic participants

Present: Verne Johnson, chair; Charles Clay, Bill Frenzel (by phone), Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, Jim Olson (by phone), and Wayne Popham (by phone)

A. Context of the meeting--Today the Civic Caucus is taking a break from its weekly sessions on public affairs topics and concentrating instead on the future of the Civic Caucus itself. During previous informal visits with Verne Johnson and Paul Gilje, Marianne Curry and David Broden both made detailed suggestions for the Civic Caucus.

B. Welcome and introductions--Verne and Paul welcomed and introduced Curry and Broden.

Curry, a St. Paul resident, is a consultant to non-profits and a consultant in environmental health. She is founder and co-chair of Metro Faith Community Nurse Network and a founder of Partners for Women's Equality, Inc. At various times she has served on the staffs of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the Minnesota House of Representatives, the Metropolitan Council, and the Community Action Council of Dakota County. She was a member of the Lakeville City Council in the 1970s.

Broden, an Orono resident, has 38 years experience in the U.S. and international defense business. Previously he was employed by Honeywell, Inc. and by Alliant Techsystems. Currently he operates his own consulting business to the defense industry. In 2007 he organized the first Minnesota Heartland Defense Conference, linking the National Defense Industrial Association with the Minnesota Defense Alliance. He has served in several volunteer positions with the Republican Party. A detailed outline of Broden's suggestions to the Civic Caucus is available on request at civiccaucus@comcast.net.

C. Comments and discussion--During the comments by Curry and Broden and in discussion with the Civic Caucus the following points were made:

1. Civic Caucus process can be a model for others--Curry said the Civic Caucus offers great potential for the future and could even be a prototype for the nation as a "virtual organization" because it uses new technology to offer a new approach for people to participate without having to leave home to attend meetings. Beginning in the 1960s in the environmental movement, Curry said she always has seen herself as a change agent.

2. Strategic plan needs more details and timelines--Curry has looked over the Civic Caucus website, <http://civiccaucus.org>, in detail, including the strategic plan. The plan has wonderful ideas but lacks descriptions of specific tactical steps, timelines, resources required, and examples of how the Civic Caucus will carry out its ideas.

A better connection is needed between resources and what the Civic Caucus plans to do, Curry said. She said the organization need to focus carefully based on its capacity to deliver. She suggested it is better to focus on public policy in Minnesota, not nationally.

3. Fundraising is needed--Curry took note that a few core participants have provided all the funding for the organization to date. The absence of more substantial fundraising is an obvious constraint on the future of the Civic Caucus, she said. She suggested that a chairperson be enlisted to spearhead fundraising. She believes considerable potential is present among the 850 persons on the Civic Caucus email list.

4. A succession plan for Civic Caucus leadership is essential--Many top leaders in the Civic Caucus and its consultant are in their 70s and 80s, Curry noted. She said it is essential that the organization have a plan for transferring leadership.

5. Improve the feedback loop--A survey ought to be conducted to determine how more persons can be encouraged to participate in the weekly opportunities now provided for feedback on summaries of meetings and on possible recommendations, Curry suggested.

6. Identify how to measure success--The Civic Caucus should have evaluation tools available that will reveal how well the organization is fulfilling its goals, she said.

7. Urgent need to add women to core group--The Civic Caucus core to date has only included men. The core group needs balance, and that means adding women, Curry said. Many women are available with distinguished records as veterans in public policy and in appointive or elective office, Curry said.

8. Uncertainty about availability of funding for civic education--A Civic Caucus member noted that it is difficult to put a dollar value on gathering and distribution of public affairs information, as is demonstrated today by the difficulty newspapers have in surviving. Curry replied that several foundations are very much interested in public issues. It is important, she said, that a tax-exempt organization like the Civic Caucus make education its main objective.

9. Distinction from other organizations in public policy--Curry said that the Civic Caucus makes no effort to give its participants the opportunity to socialize with other participants, which is characteristic of several other organizations. Instead the Civic Caucus concentrates exclusively on public policy information and education.

Later in the meeting Broden and Curry mentioned another difference from other organizations is the excellent bipartisan dialogue on public policy that is encouraged by the Civic Caucus.

10. An almost-virtual organization--It was noted that a core group of four-to-eight individuals meets face-to-face in the Civic Caucus each week. Theoretically, even that group wouldn't need to meet face-to-face, a Civic Caucus member said. However, the face-to-face core group offers the opportunity for a more focused discussion with speakers.

11. Importance to "brand" the Civic Caucus--Broden said the Civic Caucus needs to have a "brand" that identifies itself, perhaps something like "The organization for public policy information and education on critical topics".

12. Support for the core group approach--Broden said he participates in several conference calls a week, and he likes the approach taken by the Civic Caucus in bringing together a small group of people face-to-face, with a few others connected by phone.

13. Avoiding partisan politics--The Civic Caucus does a good job of avoiding bias and partisan politics and, consequently, any form of we-versus-they in its approach to issues. He likes its emphasis on good government.

14. Importance of elected public officials *leading on public policy, not just managing*--Looking back over the last 30-40 years, Broden senses that Minnesota needs its elected public officials to return to leadership, which he said was present more in the past than today.

15. Increase the number of participants--The Civic Caucus needs to undertake specific steps to increase its participants significantly beyond 850, Broden said.

16. Expand beyond the metropolitan area--Both in focus of topics and with its participants the Civic Caucus needs to move beyond the metro area to the entire state, Broden said. The organization is set up well to serve people regardless of their geographic location.

17. Pay attention to how people are using the information--For the Civic Caucus to be effective it must learn how people are using, and can use, the information provided to meet their needs, Broden said. Thus, the Civic Caucus should take steps to find out what people now are doing with the information the Civic Caucus provides.

18. Hold an occasional meeting--More visibility for the Civic Caucus would help, Broden said. Perhaps, he suggested, the Civic Caucus could sponsor an occasional breakfast or luncheon or explore ways to obtain TV coverage.

19. Widen opportunities for suggestion of topics--Broden wondered whether only the core group selected the topics for inquiry. If so, it should seek input from its broad group of participants.

20. Whether participants should have an opportunity to converse directly with one another--It was noted that currently the Civic Caucus doesn't share email addresses of participants. Broden asked whether the Civic Caucus should give its participants and chance to converse directly with one another or whether they should be able to comment back-and-forth on the website, as in a blog.

21. Request endorsements from notable public figures--The Civic Caucus website would benefit if the organization could receive endorsements from public figures that could be placed on the website, Broden suggested.

22. Ability of the Civic Caucus to expand--Verne Johnson, the Civic Caucus chair, said we've received many good suggestions today, but the question is whether the Civic Caucus can, or should, undertake an ambitious expansion program. Curry suggested that the key question isn't how ambitious the program happens to be, but what steps can be taken, incrementally, toward an ultimate objective.

23. Uncertain attitude of top corporate executives--In years past, a Civic Caucus member said, corporate officers would be willing to be educated on public affairs issues within the state and often would lend support for innovative solutions. But that situation no longer is present. Top corporate leaders in Minnesota today are "contract" leaders, Broden said. They are "floaters", brought in by their corporations but with no roots in the community. Broden suggested that involvement of other executives just below the CEO level is needed. A Civic Caucus member said that we need to recognize that corporations today are increasingly global and for a variety of reasons concentrate on quarterly earnings. They need to do what they do well. This member doesn't see them becoming involved civically. Curry suggested that local CEO's might be receptive to suggestions for more civic education of corporate leaders.

24. Whether polarization/paralysis is decreasing in the Legislature--A Civic Caucus member commented that it appears that the Governor and Legislature in 2008 appeared to concentrate more on getting things done and less on attacking one another. The member inquired whether such a change is permanent or temporary. Broden and Curry said they think it's temporary. Broden didn't see much evidence of a former sense of leadership surfacing.

25. Whether party designation should be re-examined--Curry said that evidence of leadership seemed to diminish after party designation for legislators was enacted for the 1973 Legislature. She asked whether the Legislature ought to re-visit that decision. Curry said she is concerned about retirees leaving the state as well as companies going global. A member observed that keeping retirees involved in public issues is an objective of the Civic Caucus.

26. Thanks--On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne thanked Curry and Broden for meeting with us today.

D. Upcoming Civic Caucus schedule--Verne and Paul reviewed our schedule of upcoming meetings:

- Friday, June 20, a review of the 2008 Legislature, with four legislative observers
- Thursday, July 10, with Duane Benson, Minnesota Early Learning Foundation
- Friday, July 18, with Arlene McCarthy, director of transportation planning, Metropolitan Council
- Friday, July 25, with Joe Graba, Education Evolving
- Friday, August 1, with Bruce Mooty, consultant to the Legislature on transportation

E. Statement on constitutional amendment--Verne said the Civic Caucus will be working on a position paper on the environmental constitutional amendment to be voted on in the November 2008 election.