LWVO State House Day - March 7, 2017

Kristin Vessey, Land Use Specialist

This is the start of the new biennium so it's the 132^{nd} General Assembly legislative session. That means any bill left from the last legislative session must be reintroduced.

There are several issues to watch: There is an expectation that the members of the majority caucus will again be targeting clean energy standards and efficiency rules (*Cleveland Plain Dealer* 15 Feb 2017). In addition, the oil and gas severance tax increase (\$448 million) that Governor Kasich keeps trying to enact (*The Blade*, 10 Feb 2017) is unlikely to pass, since the oil and gas industry vehemently opposes it.

Meanwhile, Ohio has real problems that are going unaddressed or under-addressed: Licking County has the highest level of radon in the state (according to *The Columbus Dispatch* on 15 Feb 2017); there is a colony of northern long-eared bats (a threatened species by Endangered Species Act (ESA) standards) that is holding up the NEXUS pipeline through northern Ohio say both *The Newark Advocate & The Blade* (13 Feb 2017); algae-infested Lake Erie full of dredging debris; the Piketon brownfield area asked the US Dept. of Energy (DOE) for a 60-day extension of its draft Environmental Assessment in order to clean it up before development occurs there.

As of mid-Feb, only 6 bills relating to Land Use have been introduced. They are HB29 (Municipal Water Buffers), HB15 (Revenue for Mine Funds), HB62 (Water Quality Improvement), SB2 (Env. Protection Laws), SB50 (Well Injection-Prohibition), and SB53 (Natural Gas Restriction). All have had only their first hearing (introduction) and are likely to go no farther, except SB2, which is part of the budget. You may wonder if Ohio is faring well.

As an umbrella portfolio, Land Use includes water, fracking, brownfields & greenfields, large factory farms (CAFOs), eminent domain, energy, transportation, methane and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), lead, manure, marijuana, and waste disposal. We don't always succeed in covering all of these, but we try. While oil and gas prices fell last year, that was in part because production was curtailed by OPEC; the same may not be true this year because many shale producers will be enticed back to the market by higher prices (*The Blade*, 14 Feb 2017).

TO DO: What can you do? Talk with your state legislators and urge them to support the severance tax and use of renewable energy sources. Locally, learn more about methane and sources of lead, and explore local methods to reduce contamination.