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IMMEDIATE RELEASE – THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2011
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CIVIC FEDERATION SUPPORTS FY2012 FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT BUDGET

(CHICAGO) The Civic Federation supports the \$195.0 million proposed FY2012 Forest Preserve District of Cook County budget because it holds the property tax levy flat during a period of ongoing financial hardship for Cook County residents and takes steps toward more effective personnel management. The full 51-page analysis is available at civicfed.org.

In the analysis, the Civic Federation commends Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and Forest Preserve District General Superintendent Arnold Randall for conducting a comprehensive desk audit that examined District personnel procedures. The audit represents a significant step toward more effective management and oversight of the District's operations. The results of the audit showed significant operational inefficiencies and much confusion as to job descriptions, personnel policies and career advancement processes. "The Civic Federation applauds this step to improve the District's operations," said Laurence Msall, president of the Civic Federation. "However, the sheer lack of personnel management exposed by the audit is yet another example of the poor oversight provided by the double-duty Commissioners who govern both the District and Cook County."

In addition to exercising fiscal restraint by freezing the property tax levy and imposing no program fee increases, the District prudently maintains substantial reserves. Building fund balance is a best practice for governments and has allowed the District to support its operations and increase funds available to acquire more real estate without raising taxes or fees. On the other hand, the District's fund balance recently reached 96.1% of operating expenditures, far higher than the 17% level recommended by the Government Finance Officers Association. The Federation thus recommends that the District consider setting a maximum target for reserves.

The Federation continues to urge President Preckwinkle, County Commissioners and the Illinois General Assembly to work together to create a separate governing board for the Forest Preserve District. The dual board structure in which one set of Commissioners governs both the \$3 billion enterprise that is Cook County and the District leads to unavoidable conflicts of interest and ill-serves both governments. The Federation supports the creation of a new, unpaid Forest Preserve Board that would be elected via a county-wide, non-partisan election. The creation of a separate governing board would neither create a new government entity nor result in additional costs to taxpayers.

The Federation makes additional recommendations to improve the financial health of the Forest Preserve District pension fund and enhance the budget document in the complete report available on the Civic Federation website.

The Civic Federation is an independent, non-partisan government research organization founded in 1894. The Federation's membership includes business and professional leaders from a wide range of Chicago area corporations, professional service firms and institutions. For more information, please visit the Federation's website at www.civicfed.org.

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