



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®

ANOKA, BLAINE, COON RAPIDS AREA

THE VOTER
SEPTEMBER 2017

Our Fall Kickoff

Monday evening, September 11

Time: 6:00 Social and Light Supper/6:30 Program

Location: Andover City Hall's Senior Center, at the north end of the building, 1685 Crosstown Blvd NW

Don't miss this one! Our guest will be Michelle Witte, Executive Director of League of Women Voters Minnesota. Learn about the power of this non-profit organization to influence public policy and educate and inform.



A long-time League member and volunteer herself, Michelle is enthusiastic about the organization's mission of empowering volunteers to become active in community and government affairs. Hear about Michelle's vision for League of Women Voters in the upcoming year.

You'll also learn about our local League's fall plans for conducting candidate forums for school boards positions in Spring Lake Park and Anoka-Hennepin, for conducting voter registrations in high schools, and more. Be prepared to sign up to help with the forums and voter registrations.

Additionally, we will present our annual Friend of League award that honors an individual or organization making a significant impact on our communities through cooperation and support

Save the Dates:

Wednesday October 4, 6:30 pm -- Candidate Forum for Spring Lake Park School Board

Monday, October 9, 6pm – LWV ABC regular meeting, Andover Senior Center

Tuesday, October 10, 6:30 pm -- Candidate Forum for Anoka-Hennepin School Board

Saturday, October 21, 10:00 am -- Affordable Housing in the Metropolitan Area, presented by Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues of Women Voters (CMAL) See flyer on LWV ABC's facebook page

Monday, October 23, 10:00 am-- LWV ABC Board Meeting at Davannis in Coon Rapids, 11:00 lunch orders; 11:30 meeting



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Join in LWV ABC's 2017 Election Activities – Voter Services

LWV moves into voter education mode again with two candidate forums for Anoka-Hennepin and Spring Lake Park School Boards.

The Spring Lake Park forum will be held on Wednesday, October 4th at 6:30 PM at Blaine City Hall. Four at-large seats are open in District 16. Seven candidates, Steven Aalund, Kelly Delfs, Marilynn Forsberg, Michael Kreun, Daphne Ponds, John Stroebel, and Amy Wheaton, are running.

The Anoka-Hennepin District 11 forum for Districts 3, 4, and 6 will be held on Tuesday, October 10th at 6:30 PM in the School Board chambers in the Sandburg Building on Monroe between 2nd and 3rd in Anoka. Running for AH District 3 is Jessica Geisler and Bill Harvey. In District 4, Anna Dirkswager and Brian Herda are running for the seat left open by William Fields. In District 6 Jeff Simon is running unopposed.

LWV ABC will need ushers, greeters, timers and moderators for these forums. Plan to sign up at the September 11th Kick off meeting!

Columbia Heights and Anoka-Hennepin will also have referenda in the November 7th Election. QCTV and LWV ABC plans to sponsor an informational program on the Anoka-Hennepin Referendum questions.

We will be registering voters at the high schools on or around September 26th, National Voter Registration Day. It's so important to get the seniors who will be 18 by Election Day registered so they establish the voting habit immediately. Which high school would you like to go to? Sign up at the September meeting.





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A Very Successful Fundraiser!

A full house was on hand for a summertime social with “Will Rogers”. Will, as portrayed by Mel Aanerud of Ham Lake, brought laughter and thoughtful inspiration as he shared news and reflections from the 1920s and 30s that often had a ring of familiarity to today’s experiences.



A fine buffet with foods prepared by members and a bountiful silent auction provided an enjoyable setting for members and the many community residents who turned out to support the event. The net profit of over \$2,000 will be used to support non-partisan community events and forums that educate and inform.

In addition to Mel and all the volunteers who prepared food, contributed to and conducted the silent auction, did set-up, promoted the event, attended and brought guests and volunteered in many roles, we are very appreciative of the use of the space at First Congregational Church in Anoka. The stage, spacious kitchen and seating areas, and the use of tables and dishes contributed to a very successful evening.





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Observer Corps Update
Jeorgette Knoll, LWV ABC President

Two years ago LWV ABC began observing the Anoka County Board of Commissioners to try to understand when and how decisions are made at the Anoka County level. Before we made the decision to form an Observer Corps and take on the task of attending meetings there was an incident and a decision made that, to League members didn't make sense and we wanted to question the board regarding the decision. The first thing we realized was that there is no clear procedure in Anoka County to address the board.

With that, we formed the Observer Corps and began documenting process and procedures to better understand the decision-making process and citizen participation. After two years of observing, members of the Observer Corps felt they had the information necessary to report to the Anoka County Board on their experience and observations.

The Observer Corps is by no means finished. We will continue to observe Anoka County Board meetings. In addition, we are asking members who are interested in observing local meetings such as city councils, local boards, school district meetings, etc. to join the observer corps and to report back to LWV on your observations. Let us know and we will get to you the information you need to be a LWV ABC observer.



The letter sent to the board members to address our concerns and to thank them for the strides they have made since we began observing is appended at the end of this newsletter, beginning on page 7.



Voter Services in Action!
LWV ABC participated in the Coon Rapids "Night to Unite" on National Night Out, August 1, 2017. We had a voter registration table, with forms they could fill out and mail in, and eligibility information. It was a beautiful evening. Thanks to Diann Halvorsen and Arlene Gillette for doing this!



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Highlights of LWV ABC Board Meeting, August 28, 2017

The Treasurer gave us a wrap-up of our "Evening With Will Rogers" fund raiser, with over \$2,000 raised to support our programming for the year. It was a successful evening, with over 80 in attendance, a wide variety of delicious salads and desserts available, and a large silent auction with many lovely and interesting items. Mel Aanerud as Will Rogers was warm, humorous, and educational. A real treat. Thanks to all who participated!



Voter Service reports we will be holding two school board forums this Fall.

The Program Committee reported on our member meeting topics for the upcoming year. Michelle Witte, LWV MN Executive Director will speak at our Kick-Off meeting in September.

Sips and Civility...

LWV will be trying something new – a Wednesday evening meeting at Alloy Brewing in Coon Rapids featuring informal discussions of ... the topics from our last meeting? Things in the news? Books? Movies? So far, what we have is a scheduled date (the Wednesday after our Monday meeting – the first one is tentatively set for November 15. Alloy Brewing is at 2700 Coon Rapids Blvd in Coon Rapids.



If you would like to be part of the team that plans these meetings, contact us at lwvabc@lwvmn.org and raise your hand. We'd like to use these informal events to open up to new people who may be interested in talking policy and learning more about LWV

over a pint! And the name – Sips and Civility – is up for grabs. Better ideas are welcome!



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Civics 101 –

Joellen Ambrose and Civics 101 – new LWV ABC members met on August 28 at Becky Ahlstrom’s house for an informal gathering to discuss basic principles of democracy, structure of U.S. and state government and tips for effective advocacy. Kay McCulley was on hand and had this report: ...”the people who came to this event want to make a difference in the world, have limited time to contribute to that, but have an abundance of interest and willingness to go forward. We had a chance to talk specifically about



importance of League as a nonpartisan organization and learning about issues before we agreed on positions....they are also definitely on board with that and understand the difference between that approach and almost strictly advocacy groups....also talked about networking with other groups.”



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Letter to the Anoka County Board:



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August 29, 2017

Anoka County Commissioner Ronda Sivarajah
Anoka County Commissioner Jim Kordiak
Anoka County Commissioner Robyn West
Anoka County Commissioner Matt Look
Anoka County Commissioner Julie Braastad
Anoka County Commissioner Scott Schulte
Anoka County Commissioner Mike Gamache
Anoka County Administrator Jerry Soma

Two years ago, the League of Women Voters ABC (Anoka, Blaine and Coon Rapids Area) selected Anoka County Government as a focus of study because we felt it was difficult for citizens to understand where and how decisions are made in Anoka County, how citizens could participate and how information was shared with the public.

Our concerns focused on decision-making procedures and not policy determinations. For the most part, we want to thank you for being welcoming to our Observer Corp members at committee and board meetings and for being responsive to questions and concerns expressed.

We understand that the committee system used by Anoka County for years makes conducting business more efficient. However in many cases, the system makes it more difficult for the public to follow the discussions and understand how decisions are made.

First, thank you for acting upon concerns that we identified as they occurred. These include:

- **Availability of complete board packet:** A copy of the board agenda was available in the back of the meeting room, but not the complete attachments and resolutions. A complete board packet is now available for use by attendees.



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- **Added agenda items:** Items were often added to agendas after the agendas had been posted to the website. We do want to see business conducted in a timely manner, but the added agenda items did not seem to rise to the level of being unanticipated and/or needing urgent attention. The reduction in these occurrences of added items is noted and allows observers to be better prepared for business to be conducted.
- **Time for public comment:** We are concerned that public comment time does not exist at board meetings as is common practice at most of the metro area county commission's board meetings. We appreciate the compromise that public comment time is now provided on the agenda at committee meetings.
- **Spoken information at committee meetings:** The seating arrangement at the table in the committee room was such that the public sat at the backs of commissioners and thus were unable to hear their comments. The willingness of commissioners to speak up so that visitors can hear and to seat themselves on one side of the table provides a welcome access to what is being said.
- **Public hearing notifications:** There are opportunities for briefly describing the purpose of a public hearing so that the public can better assess its importance. For instance, the first public notice on restoring a tax after the dissolution of the Counties Transit Improvement Board may have met the legal requirement but not sufficient for people to understand. Our concern was received and acknowledged. The second time it was considered, the notice was a bit longer and was more understandable and created less concern on the part of the public.

With that said, we are left with the unresolved area of concern that initiated this study – Where or how the discussions are held that result in the board members' decisions?

Observer Corps members were advised that the Anoka County Board uses a committee system and that by observing committee meetings we would hear decision-making discussions. The committee meetings are not televised and are held during the day when most of the public can not attend, so the public would never know how those decisions are made. Observer Corps members attended committee meetings for over a year and infrequently viewed interactive conversations.

We found that, except for the Parks & Community Services Committee and the Transportation Committee where there are real discussions of issues, it seems that decisions are predetermined. A commissioner pointed out to us that if we were to attend every meeting then we would have a better understanding. But that is not the public's role, and it should be the responsibility of the elected officials to make it as clear to the public as possible. One commissioner, at a candidates' forum, commented that he wasn't versed on an item because he wasn't a member of that pertinent committee and relies on



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the conclusions of the committee members. It belies the ability of the public to understand if even members of the board do not.

The practice of allowing items from the committees to be referred to the full board without a quorum in attendance at the committee meeting seems to contradict the perception that the items are presented to the full board after full committee discussion. We suggest that maybe an alternate could be appointed to each committee to insure there is full discussion when a member is unable to attend. We are not suggesting that all members be members of all committees, which would defeat the purpose of the committee system, but we do want to make it possible to have quorums when committees take action.

We noted that the county board declares that their actions are transparent because the county board meetings are televised. But very little can be learned from observing these board meetings. Resolutions are stated, moved, and voted upon by resolution number and rarely are discussions held that would establish a commissioner's voting decision.

If the explanation is that such decision-making discussions are held at the committee level, then there should be televised access to those meetings. If not televised, then there should be, at a minimum, a summary presentation at the board meeting of the committee discussion that took place. This might make Board meetings longer, but it would add greatly to public transparency, and likely would be helpful to the board members as well.

When items are added to the agenda after it has been published on the website, the televised coverage of those items is meaningless to the public. If one must be present to obtain a current agenda and resolutions, then televised coverage of a meeting that only states a resolution number and takes a vote is an overstated impression of transparency.

One such example was the televised coverage of the November 22 board meeting. Under the Management Committee Report, it was stated there would be "several additional items" on the agenda. One of the additions was "Resolution 2016 M7," "pertaining to compensation for Anoka County employees and county commissioners...." The resolution wasn't on the published agenda for the preceding Management Committee meeting nor on the agenda for the full board, the resolution wasn't made available on the website, and was referenced in the meeting by a resolution number that still doesn't exist on the website

Watching the televised coverage for this item offered no transparency. Television viewers had no access to the resolution, only the title of the resolution was read in the meeting with no summary of the content, and no supporting information was offered as to how the salary increases were arrived at. None of the commissioners had any questions or



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comments. A member of our Observer Corps attended the preceding Management Committee meeting and has documentation that there was no discussion of that agenda item at the committee meeting. This exemplifies our concern as to how and where such decisions are made and why it was urgent to place this on the agenda without advance notice to the public.

It is disconcerting that we had members at the meeting and watching via televised coverage, and they did not know that the action taken included a raise in salaries. Again, we are not arguing the policy but rather the procedure that was not transparent.

Additionally, we acknowledge that it is not convenient to the commissioners and staff, but given that many citizens are unable to attend meetings during the day we suggest that some important meetings be held in the evening when more of the working citizens can attend.

We appreciate the above noted modifications made to date, but we hope to be able to observe more open discussions and decision making in our quest to understand where and how discussions are held that result in board members' decisions. LWV ABC would like to meet and discuss where and how the Anoka County Board of Commissioners makes decisions; please let us know of a time that works for members of the board. Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jeorgette Knoll, president
League of Women Voters ABC
lwvabc@gmail.com