

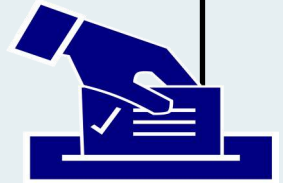
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**The  
Fresno Voter**

Our League's 82nd Year!



December  
No Regular  
Board Meeting

Sunday,  
December 10  
Holiday Party



Monday, January 8  
Regular Board Meeting  
4 p.m.—Zoom  
link will be sent

Saturday, January 20  
Brown Bag Lunch  
Speaker /TBA  
11:30 a.m.  
Stone Soup  
Details later

*We All Need Some Holiday Cheer*  
Please join us for Friends and Food  
Sunday, December 10 \* 3–5 p.m.

Generously hosted by  
**Cathy and Patrick Caples**  
Appetizers and desserts lovingly contributed by Board members



**Please bring a gift for Stone Soup children  
and families \* see ideas on page 7**



**Directions to 7232 West Dovewood Lane \* Fresno \* 559-304-2687**  
**West on Shaw to N. Grantland \* Left onto West Roberts \***  
**Immediate left on N. Maruyama Ave.**  
**Right onto West Dovewood Lane \* Last house on right, with flagpole**





## Co-president's Message



**November 2023**

**A**s the season here changes and the trees show their vivid fall colors, the world-wide climate and its radical variability fill the news. Last year brought our valley a break from the immediate impact of drought and uncontrolled wildfires in our mountains. What is this year likely to hold? Change is likely and planning for change is a challenge that is occupying League energy in a variety of projects.

Our climate action committee is currently interested in the Farm Bill making its way through Congress. Funds were allocated in the Inflation Reduction Act to incentivize climate-smart agricultural approaches to building healthy soil, protecting topsoil, increasing water efficiency, improving biodiversity, and increasing carbon sequestration. Some of that funding, should it stay in the bill, would likely bring changes to our area. We should be writing our representatives in Congress to be sure that funding is kept in the bill.

*(see our nice publicity in LWVC article, page 7)*

Our members who are engaged in water issues continue to monitor the progress of ground water management plans that only seemed less important while our river and the local canals were filled with the surface water runoff of last year's record snows. It is tempting to let immediate conditions take away our focus from the long-term reach of the decisions that are being made now.

More of the future is being addressed in the County General Plan as it is currently being amended. It has the potential—should it actually guide planning decisions—to have major social and environmental impacts for years. We have members who have devoted themselves to watching and commenting on that Plan as well as a possible new Measure C tax measure that will address the next 20 to 30 years of transportation projects. League members and the public at large will likely be tasked with imagining what a transportation future could look like in our area.

Recognizing the inevitability of change makes responsiveness in our officials and our decision-making processes essential. Ensuring that sort of responsiveness requires vigilance on our part.

*Kay*

**December event:** Our regular board meeting has been cancelled in favor of a holiday party. Guests will be requested to bring gifts for pre-schoolers who attend Stone Soup. See page 7

**Member meetings:** Much discussion about the relatively small attendance at member meetings, whether in person or on-line. We will try a new format for January with a Saturday bring-your-own-lunch event at Stone Soup. Also talk about another survey although those in the past have yielded minimal responses.

**Voter Services:** Sue and Robin will have a registration and information table at the Block Party at Reading and Beyond on November 17. Francine is a board member there and made the connection.

**Farm Bill:** Thanks to huge efforts by Lenore, Kay and others, information was sent throughout the state to get other Leagues to support this bill.

**Mural:** The Board reviewed several different drafts by the muralist recommended by the Leadership Council. He had been given rather specific requests for content. We decided that if it was possible we would like to see submissions by other muralists, and give him and the others the opportunity to design more freely.

**LWVF IS A 501 C3 non-profit organization and all donations, including dues, are tax deductible. Donations are always accepted for the RBG Scholarship Fund at San Joaquin College of Law, the League's general fund, and any other purpose. Send to Treasurer, LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710**



**The Voter is a monthly publication of the League of Women Voters of Fresno**  
**Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710**  
**Volume 82 No. 12 Editor: Francine M. Farber**

# SouthEast Development Area: a plan for more urban sprawl?



Keith  
Bergthold  
Patience-  
Milrod



League members Keith Bergthold and Patience Milrod provided an important but distressing workshop for members and guests with their discussion about the Southeast Development Area (SEDA) plans last month.

Bergthold is a leader of a group called the Greenfield Coalition that advocates for revitalizing Fresno’s urban core, preserving its agricultural and green spaces and committed to responsible growth and urban planning. Milrod is an activist attorney who fights for equality and human rights.

The workshop was important because it highlighted the watchdog role that we all need to play when a massive development such as SEDA is in the works. And it was distressing because the data indicates that SEDA will be an environmental disaster for our region.

In August 2023, the Greenfield Coalition released an independent study by ECO Northwest to analyze the impacts of fringe development on the urban core. The Fresno Urban Decay Analysis outlines the following five causes of urban decay in our city:

**Inefficient Land Use:** New developments in annexation areas cannot completely pay for themselves because, on average, they are not introducing new residents to the tax base but rather shifting residents around within the City.

**Flight:** Higher-income households moving out of the legacy communities exacerbates decay, as there is a loss of property and sales tax revenue.

**Investment Patterns:** Deferred maintenance, deferred upgrades, and antiquated infrastructure have negative impacts by perpetuating the decay of the neighborhoods left behind.

**Location/Relocation of Institutional Uses:** Fresno has a history of large-scale public and governmental users leaving the central city to move further north in the city

**Location of Uses with Negative Neighborhood Effects:** While uses that benefit central Fresno have moved north, in southwest Fresno land that was designated for agricultural uses has been approved for industrial uses, despite the neighborhood consisting primarily of residential uses and single-family homes

No budget

No finance analysis  
Serious impacts

on health, air, water

- ◆ SEDA would annex 9,000 acres east of Temperance Avenue in the Clovis and Sanger Unified School Districts
- ◆ Of SEDA’s 45,000 planned new homes, relatively few will be multi-family and none are designated affordable for low-income families
- ◆ SEDA would require Sanger Unified to build 15 new schools, including another high school.
- ◆ SEDA would require existing residents to connect to city utilities at their own cost, as much as \$100,000 per household
- ◆ Extending infrastructure for SEDA is estimated to cost the City \$2 to \$3 billion.
- ◆ **Without SEDA**, Fresno’s Air Pollution will **decrease** by over half a million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year by 2035.
- ◆ **With SEDA**, Fresno’s Air Pollution will **increase** by over half a million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year by 2035.



## **A new Measure C proposal arises from the ashes**

by Kay Bertken

The League has been part of a coalition of community groups that opposed the failed Measure C on last November's ballot. Recognizing the need for a local transportation tax and a better ballot outcome, a group of five coalition members and five representatives of those who supported the last measure (including the mayors of Fresno and Clovis) have been meeting to discuss a path forward.

The coalition proposed a community-lead process for generating a "new and improved" Measure C. After negotiation and amendment, the proposal got general support from the Pro C group members, with the exception of Henry Perea, a former member of the Board of Supervisors. It also gained tentative approval from mayors on the Fresno Council of Governments (COG). Recently, members of our County Board of Supervisors objected that they, as elected officials, were left out-- an opinion echoing Mr. Perea. Now the "Yes on C" folks in the group of ten have waffled.

The proposed process grew from the sense that the previous ballot measure was crafted behind closed doors and largely ignored public input. The proposal, which prioritizes public voice, includes five elements: an administrative team, a facilitation team, public meetings, a drafting team, and the government bodies (Board of Supervisors, COG, city mayors and the Fresno County Transportation Authority (FCTA)).

The administrative team would be responsible for moving the process forward, managing the facilitation team, and providing updates to COG and FCTA. It would not make decisions about the final measure. The facilitation team would be composed of professional facilitators who would prepare materials for the public meetings and provide meeting summaries to the drafting team. Multiple public meetings would be held around the county. The drafting team would incorporate public meeting input into intermediate draft language to be fed back to public meetings. They would also write the final draft of the measure. The cities, county, COG and FCTA would receive, review, and approve the final draft of the measure. For some elected officials, that role is not enough. *(continued on page 6)*

## *Climate Change*

by Lenore Yousef



We know that governments have the major role in decreasing and eliminating the use of fossil fuels if we are to save our way of life. However, a significant contributor to climate change is food waste, which makes up 21.6% of landfills, emits methane upon decomposing and accounts for one-fifth of methane emissions in the US. Methane is a more short-lived greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, but it is many times more effective in trapping heat than carbon dioxide. Methane also affects air quality by leading to ozone production.

Not only does food waste impact climate change, it also squanders resources such as money, water, energy and land used to produce food that will not be consumed. Food waste occurs throughout the production process. The EPA estimated that, over a year, wasted food consumes the water and energy that could have been used by more than 50 million homes, requires an agricultural area equivalent to California and New York, uses enough fertilizer to grow all plant-based foods for our nation's human consumption, and emits greenhouse gases equivalent to 42 coal-fired power plants.



According to the EPA, food waste from residents accounted for 40% of the waste, with 27% from restaurants and 14% from supermarkets. SB 1383, California's Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy's goal is to divert 75% of organic waste from landfills below 2014 levels by 2025. The organic waste is to be composted and then used in place of chemical fertilizers.

The law also requires that not less than 20% of currently disposed edible food be used to mitigate food insecurity. According to CalRecycle, by January 2022, 75% of jurisdictions had organic waste collection in place. The City of Fresno has not yet complied with SB 1383, which will require hiring a composting company to collect and compost, developing a public education program to increase compliance, and monitoring how much organic waste is collected, so it seems very unlikely that the City can comply with SB 1383 by 2025.

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## *Behavioral Health*

by Carolyn Evans



The Department of Behavioral Health is a large entity with an equally large staff that deals with many clients. Recently it unveiled its new organizational structure that has been in the planning stages since before the pandemic. It is hoped that this new structure will clarify responsibilities and lead to better services for the community.

Susan Holt is Director of DBH and is the Public Guardian for Fresno County. Marcella Black is the Deputy Director of Behavioral Health Plan Administration and Quality Management; Deputy Director Maryann Le heads Behavioral Health Administration Operations and the Public Guardian's Office; Deputy Director Emma Rasmussen leads the Integrated Behavioral Health Services and Coordination; and Deputy Director Lesby Flores is in charge of Integrated Behavioral Health Services and Coordination.

The Behavioral Health Board learned about the expansion of criteria for grave disability when applying for involuntary detainment known as 5150 hold. The expansion will include substance use that is not co-occurring with a mental health condition, new language for situations when people cannot provide for their own personal safety or physical health, and expansion of rules regarding who may testify at hearings for involuntary holds

This will increase greatly the number of individuals who will need services from the Department. The law allows for the Board of Supervisors to delay implementation for up to two years. The Department will request the delay to provide time to develop appropriate treatment programs, but hopes to be prepared before the end of the two-year deferment period.

The Board visited *All 4 Youth Wellness Center* at Tarpey Elementary School. Currently there are four Wellness Centers at different locations in the County, but nine more are planned for the next few years. Wellness Centers connect youth and families with resources and activities within the community, as well as on site. At Tarpey there is a monthly movie night, celebrations of special events, and art activities for families to share. Centers are valuable resources for schools, students, and the surrounding community. [evansalca@comcast.net](mailto:evansalca@comcast.net)

## *Housing*

by Marianne Kast



A recent newsletter from our Attorney General Rob Bonta had some interesting news about the AG's work on housing issues.

Statewide, the AG's office has defended numerous challenges to Project Homekey, the effort by California to provide housing for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Some jurisdictions challenged Homekey because those projects are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act; others, like the City of El Cajon, refused to accept housing voucher payments on behalf of Homekey residents. Both of these examples are attempts to derail a successful



program that has created over 14,000 permanent or interim homes in the state. FYI, About \$63M in Homekey funding has come to Fresno.

A number of cities have tried to evade the mandates of the Housing Accountability Act. This law requires local governments to approve code-compliant housing development projects. If a city denies a housing project without making specific findings of "public health and safety" impacts, the city can be sued and forced to reverse the denial.

The AG's office has enticed compliance (by lawsuits, letters of accountability, technical assistance, etc.) resulting in 5,878 housing units created, of which 1,743 were affordable housing units. Projects in the cities of Elk Grove, Huntington Beach, Livermore, Mill Valley, Santa Monica, Cloverdale, Carlsbad, and others, have been approved using this tool.

But tougher penalties and legal action against municipalities that fail to adopt housing elements (in their general plans) that plan for their fair share of affordable housing could have long-term positive effect on affordable housing. Many California municipalities have failed to update their housing elements and the associated zoning changes as required. A recently settled lawsuit is forcing the City of Clovis to plan for higher-density, lower-cost housing. Pressing compliance to housing elements will not guarantee that homes get built, but it does assure that space and enticements for this kind of development exist.

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# Education

by Kay Bertken



Next Board Meetings

Wednesday, December 6

Wednesday, December 13

The big news from FUSD is the settlement of the contract disputes and avoidance of a teacher strike. A negotiated tentative agreement was reached just the day before a strike was to begin. The Board voted to approve the tentative agreement at its November 1 meeting and will vote on the final agreement at its December 6 meeting.

Besides advances in compensation and health care benefits, the contract contains new provisions for collaboration. The parties agreed to training in interest-based bargaining that would allow for continuous opportunities for facilitated discussions over single contractual items. Once consensus is reached on a particular item, it would update the collective bargaining agreement. It is a method that avoids last minute bargaining over all the disputed issues in a contract.

There is a section of the agreement that calls for a joint leadership pilot to determine repurposing a portion of the unrestricted general fund savings from the previous year. Another pledges the district to work collaboratively with the FTA in determining the expenditure of at least half of an approved new bond measure to address class size reduction. Another eliminates much of the prescriptive detail of professional learning provisions in favor of a general collaborative structure with an appeal process for teachers who might be unhappy with the offering.

A separate resolution that was adopted last month pledged the district to work with the FTA to identify the most impactful student and family service supports along with the expenditure of \$30 million during the 23/24, 24/25, and 25/26 school years for that purpose.

# Voter Services

by Sue Goldman



A presentation was made to the League's re-born Student Unit in November. It was nice to see a large group including some young men. They seemed interested in conducting voter registration on campus, as well as getting involved in voter engagement. We talked about some activity they could do to get interest in registering students and getting them to actually vote. They were also offered the option to participate in the phone bank or open ballots in future elections.

The League has a new retractable sign for displays. Voter information guides were picked up from the elections office in multiple languages. Robin Chiero and I

tabled at the Reading and Beyond Block Party utilizing the new sign and the voter information guides. That organization works with inner city children and families out of the Mosqueda Center, located in a poverty-impacted neighborhood. We connected with them through Francine Farber, who is a long-time R and B board member,

It was interesting to see the many varied services that organization offers for children and adults. In addition to the usual services, on the day of the block party they offered free turkeys to the first 50 people attending and the Valley Air Pollution District offered free air purifiers to anyone living in the zip code of the organization. One special and gratifying interaction involved a young woman who in 2015 won a Bette Peterson

scholarship that the League offered. She has since become a social worker and now wants to join the League.

The filing deadline for candidates is December 8. The Voter Services committee is considering doing a candidate forum for BOS candidates in at least one district. It looks like District 2 will have a number of candidates.

## Measure C

*(continued from page 4)*

The future of this process is an open question, as is the future of a renewed transportation tax. The coalition (and we) believe that a public-driven process will not only generate a better ballot measure, but will simultaneously gain citizen votes. Stay tuned for what will surely be battles over who should decide what our county transportation priorities should be.

*kaybertken752@gmail.com*

# County delays adoption of new General Plan

by Radley Reep

The adoption of a new Fresno County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance is delayed to 2024.

The County of Fresno had hoped to adopt new plans in 2023. As previously reported in the Voter, at a Planning Commission meeting this past September, County personnel said they hoped to bring draft documents to the Commission for consideration in October and to the Board of Supervisors for final approval in November.

Clearly, that did not happen. Information from the Department of Public Works and Planning received by the League in late November indicated that the County is now targeting January 2024 for consideration of draft plans by the Planning Commission and February 2024 for adoption by the Board of Supervisors.

The Planning Commission calendar for 2024 shows two Thursday morning meetings in January — the first on January 11 and the second on January 25. A hearing on the revision of the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance is likely to occur on one of those two dates. Once the County finalizes the hearing date, the League will share that information with its members.

If at all possible, please attend this all-important Planning Commission meeting. County residents have expressed concern that changes proposed for the General Plan could increase urban sprawl significantly.

[radleyreep@netzero.com](mailto:radleyreep@netzero.com)



## Don't forget Stone Soup at the Holiday Party

### Suggested Gifts

Nap blankets in neutral colors (24)



Children's socks size M, shoe size 12-4



Lots of playdoh and clay



Gift cards for Food Maxx, Walmart, gas



**The following article appeared in the LWVC's "Democracy Works" publication in November. Kudos to Lenore Yousef, Kay Bertken and others who worked on this project, which required unbelievable patience and persistence.**

The League of Women Voters of Fresno County, working with the LWVUS and the LWVC, spearheaded a statewide Action Alert calling on Californians to urge federal representatives to support funding for climate-smart agriculture and conservation technical assistance in the 2023 Farm Bill.

California's agricultural industry employs almost 10% of our workforce, provides more than 50% of the fruit and vegetables consumed in the United States, and is vital for our nation's food security. Our agricultural lands are also an integral part of the state's climate strategy. Climate-smart agricultural practices build healthy soil, protect topsoil, increase water resiliency, improve biodiversity, increase carbon sequestration, and are an essential tool for farmers to build resilience to drought. Our farmers need assistance to build a resilient, equitable and sustainable food system and Californians and League members can contact your representatives to support the 2023 Farm Bill and protect our agricultural systems right now,

by Richard Bertken MD



ur  
FDA recently approved, and the CDC endorsed, two similar vaccines against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Pharmacies are promoting the RSV shots and offering their customers vaccination appointments. But will anti-vaccine sentiment and “vaccine overload” (Covid x several, flu, shingles) influence many eligible people (over 60) to opt out? Based on recent history this seems possible, with harmful global health consequences.

RSV is a respiratory viral infection not related to flu or SARS-CoV-2. It is extremely seasonal, preferring to spread during the fall and winter months. There is no accepted antiviral treatment for it. Most people infected by it suffer only mild respiratory tract symptoms. Most cases go unrecognized because testing for RSV currently requires a visit to a doctor. Severe cases requiring hospitalization occur chiefly among newborns, children, and people over 65.

In the U.S. in an average year, about 14,000 people over the age of 65 die from RSV, compared to 32,000 from influenza. In an over-65 test group, a single vaccination reduced the risk of severe respiratory disease by 80%. Along with safety comparable to flu vaccinations, this data led the CDC to recommend the shot for all people over 60. It is likely that the vaccines will also be recommended for pregnant women in their third term to effectively immunize their newborns by transmission of RSV antibodies from mom to baby.

## **Immunization protects individual and community**

As with Covid vaccines, immunization for RSV protects not only the recipient, but also the community. In addition to tracking RSV hospitalizations, wastewater analysis for RSV will provide a long-term picture of the effects of the immunization program. Already wastewater analysis led public health agencies in Ontario, Canada to predict increased risk of RSV to newborns. This facilitated targeted immunization plans for pregnant women and for newborns and infants.

RSV is a global problem, claiming 160,000 lives yearly, according to the World Health Organization. With con-

servative estimates for attainable vaccination rates and for vaccine efficacy, a global RSV vaccine program would save over 50,000 lives annually.

## **Stemming the health hazards of vaping**

E-cigarettes were first designed and manufactured in China starting in 2003. The concept was to substitute an electrically generated mist for tobacco smoke, which had been proven to promote lung disease and cancer. In the two decades since then, e-cigarettes, now widely known as vapes, have evoked a wide variety of regulatory actions by government health agencies around the world. These ranged from complete bans (8 nations) to the promotion of switching from smoked cigarettes to e-cigarettes. The latter policy is based on the relative safety of vaped compared to smoked nicotine.

However, there is gathering evidence that current vape liquids often contain or generate chemicals capable of causing acute and chronic lung disease. Vape liquid additives for flavor and viscosity attract more users but add risk for lung damage. They may be “generally regarded as safe” for ingestion by the FDA, but some are clearly not safe for inhalation, especially for habitual users.

## **Vaped cannabis easily dosed excessively**

Vaping around the world is an activity dominated by the young. Despite the FDA’s ban on sale of vapes to people under 21, 12% of American adolescents vape regularly. With the legalization of cannabis in 39 states, many are ducking the 21-year age limit to vape marijuana-derived products. This is especially dangerous due to the likelihood of excessive dosing of vaped cannabis which can cause transient or, lamentably, durable cognitive or psychiatric disorders.


The FDA was charged with regulating nicotine products by the Tobacco Control Act of 2008 but has gained no control over the use of vapes for cannabis, in part because the drug remains illegal at the federal level. Ironically, it cannot exercise regulation of agents that Congress has put in the category with heroin. So it is up to the states to draft regulations and enforcement systems to deal with vaped cannabis. This is a complex and expensive mandate that only the FDA is capable of managing for the country, assuming that it is adequately funded for this task. Progress toward federal legalization of cannabis has proceeded at a snail’s pace. Two years ago the House passed a cannabis legalization bill that died in the Senate, both actions characterized by our partisan divide.

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**What do you get when you join the League?** All for one fee, you become a member of the Fresno, California and National Leagues and receive their newsletters. You may participate in League studies of issues; receive leadership training; hone your public speaking skills; become knowledgeable about local and state issues; learn more about government, natural resources and social policies as your time and interests dictate. You will also meet some interesting and friendly women and men who represent diverse backgrounds but find common ground in keeping abreast of current issues.

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