



# UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

**League of Women Voters of Los Alamos**

**P. O. Box 158, Los Alamos, NM 87544**

[www.lwvlosalamos.org](http://www.lwvlosalamos.org)

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## **Calendar**

July 15      Lunch with a Leader, Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, Zoom, noon  
July 22      Board Meeting, Zoom, noon

### ***Lunch with a Leader: NM Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver***

This month's Lunch with a Leader will be on Thursday, July 15 from noon-1p.m. via Zoom.

Our speaker will be NM Secretary of State, Maggie Toulouse Oliver. She was first appointed to public office in 2007 when she became County Clerk in Bernalillo, New Mexico's largest county. Elected to her first full term in 2008, Toulouse Oliver served 2 ½ terms as County Clerk until she was elected as Secretary of State in 2016. Overseeing elections in the state's largest county gave Secretary Toulouse Oliver detailed, on-the-ground expertise in election administration that has helped to guide her current work overseeing elections statewide.

Since becoming Secretary of State, she has implemented increased transparency rules for financial disclosure and campaign finance reporting, modernized the online campaign finance system, helped craft and pass good government legislation such as same-day voter registration, automated voter registration, and the state's newly-formed Ethics Commission.

She will discuss voting in NM and her plans for future elections that will expand voting availability in the state.

The Zoom address will be in the email that is sent to all members and in both the *Los Alamos Reporter* and the *Los Alamos Daily Post* closer to the lunch date.

*Karyl Ann Armbruster*

# **Observer Corps Reports**

## **County Council**

### **June 8**

For the regular COVID-19 update, Beverly Simpson reported that 80% of eligible people in Los Alamos were fully vaccinated and that 91.6% of eligible people were registered for shots. Los Alamos still has the highest fully vaccinated rate in the state. At the time of her report, Los Alamos had reported 532 cases (516 recovered) and 6 deaths.

Councilor Sarah Scott reported that the Racial, Equity, and Inclusivity Board had met for the first time. They were interested in updating their charter to extend their deadline to one year from the initial meeting.

Steven Lynne, acting County Manager, reported that the new HR manager Ty Ryburn will start work July 26; he was previously the HR manager in Rio Rancho. Also the new Economic Development Administrator, Dan Ungerleider, will start July 13. Lynne said the county received \$1.8M from the Covid-19 relief bill. This is the first half of the funds; the second half is expected in about a year. And finally, the county had 33 applicants for 20 summer intern positions.

On July 6 the County Council will resume in-person Council meetings with the public present. They will also continue to have the meetings available via Zoom.

*Lynn Jones*

### **June 15**

Trey Pereyra, Chair of the Parks and Recreation Board, provided an overview and plan for the coming year. Despite COVID, some projects

were completed, including the ice rink improvements, the splash pad, the golf course irrigation system, and water meters on the North Mesa community gardens. The coming year will see work on the BMX facility (cross country bike trails), the vetting of the trails master plan, and collaboration with boards and commissions as well as community involvement. Labor shortage and staff turnovers have caused some project constraints.

John Nash, Chair of the Library Board, provided an update. Library activities over the last year were limited because of COVID, but the library was able to increase its access to digital resources, conduct virtual programming, and issue library books through curbside pick-up. The library is largely back to normal hours but is closed on Sundays because of staffing issues. The Friends of Los Alamos County Libraries donated \$50,000 to the library for programming.

Community Development Director Paul Andrus briefly discussed the County's development code, which is largely obsolete. The completion of the downtown master plans and feedback from the community are needed before the code updates can begin.

Representatives from the company hired to develop the Los Alamos and White Rock downtown master plans gave a presentation of what has been done so far. They hope to finalize the proposed plans within two months. Their goals for the master plans are to increase housing in the downtown areas; change on-site parking requirements; identify potential investors; and make both areas more pedestrian friendly and enjoyable. Their recommendations include updating zoning requirements to allow for higher density mixed use projects; allow a range of commercial/retail/entertainment and urban housing uses; increase the building height limits to four stories in White Rock and seven stories in

Los Alamos; create development standards for site and building design, parking, and landscaping that reinforce pedestrian-oriented development; and create neighborhood protection standards. Their recommendations also included safe street crossings; street and bike lane improvements; improvements to public transit to allow for proposed higher densities; Wi-Fi paired with transit centers or shelters; and updated parking standards based on national best practices. The first module concerning zoning is expected to be rolled out on July 8 with a public open house on July 22.

Finally, there was an initial discussion of how some committees and task forces are subject to the Open Meetings Act. County staff asked for clarification and suggested that some charters may need to be amended. This subject will be explored in more detail during a future meeting.

*Rebecca Chaiken*

## **June 29**

The Los Alamos County Councilors held the June 29th meeting in council chambers and in person with members of the public participating via Zoom. County Clerk Naomi Maestas presented two resolutions which were both approved by the Council. The first resolution established the County Canvassing Board through the end of 2023; designated the White Rock Town Hall and the Los Alamos County Municipal Building as the early voting locations; and designated five election day polling places for all statewide and special elections that will be conducted in 2022 and 2023. The voter convenience centers will be located at the White Rock Town Hall; Los Alamos County Golf Course Community Room; Betty Ehart Senior Center; University of New Mexico – Los Alamos; and the Los Alamos County Municipal Building. Any voter registered in Los Alamos County can vote at any of those polling places.

The second resolution increases and adjusts the number of precincts in Los Alamos County from 21 to 23. Clerk Maestas explained that if a precinct has had more than 750 votes cast in a general election, the precinct must be divided or adjusted. As precincts 5 and 10 each had more than 750 votes cast in the 2020 general election, these precincts will therefore be divided. Additionally, based on recommendations from Research & Polling, Inc., a portion of precinct 8 (the Mirador subdivision) will be merged into precinct 7, along with a boundary modification between precincts 1 and 8. These adjustments will take effect on January 1, 2022. The Clerk's office will mail notifications to the affected voters to explain the adjustments.

A public hearing was held and councilors voted to authorize the Department of Public Utilities to refinance the remainder of a loan with the New Mexico Environment Department for the Los Alamos wastewater treatment plant, allowing the DPU to take advantage of available financing with interest rates at 1%. Councilors also discussed and voted to change the charters for three Council appointed task forces: Tourism Implementation; Los Alamos Resiliency, Energy and Sustainability; and the Racial Equity and Inclusivity. The revisions emphasize that these groups should follow the Open Meetings Act.

The fiscal year 2022 salary plan that was on the consent agenda was pulled so that councilors could discuss the salary of a proposed new position: Broadband Manager. Some councilors felt that the position was graded too low, equivalent to an IT project manager and reporting to the Chief Information Officer. These councilors felt that the position should report to the County or Utilities Manager and should be graded as a department or division director. Council voted to adopt the FY 2022 salary plan with an amendment to increase the salary grade from 214 to 302 for the Broadband Manager. A

salary grade of 302 is equivalent to the Deputy Police Chief. Lastly Council voted to approve a construction contract with RMCI to build the well house and pump equipment for the newly drilled Otowi Well 2 in the amount of \$3.2 million. Bids were higher than anticipated, due to supply chain issues related to COVID. DPU plans to finance the project with financing at 1% interest loans.

*Julie Williams-Hill*

## **Board of Public Utilities**

Members of the Board of Public Utilities met virtually on June 19 for the regularly scheduled board meeting. Cornell Wright was reappointed by the County Council on June 8th for a five-year term. Utilities Manager Philo Shelton reported that as of June 9<sup>th</sup>, the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) was able to reduce the cost of gas from \$1.22 to \$0.49 per therm. The DPU has recovered its expenses related to an escalated cost of gas that occurred in February during the winter storm that affected Texas. Chair Wright asked board members if there were any objections to following the County Council lead and beginning hybrid board meetings in July. Board and staff would participate in person, with the public participating via Zoom. No members objected. With extreme drought and heat waves predicted for the summer, the DPU gave a presentation on efforts being undertaken to mitigate impacts of volatile electric markets.

*Julie Williams-Hill*

## ***June Lunch with a Leader: State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard***

State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard surprised her audience with the announcement that she and her husband have



*State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard speaks at the June LWL. Screenshot by JoAnn Lysne.*

moved from White Rock to northern Rio Arriba County to live with her mother-in-law. She went on to say that she heads “an obscure agency in an obscure state.” The State Land Office was established by the New Mexico Constitution to fund basic services including the public schools, public universities, hospitals and other public institutions.

Most of the income (royalties) comes from the non-renewable sources, primarily oil and gas production, and goes into the Land Grant Permanent Fund, which now has over \$30 billion. The fund is managed by the State Investment Council, which is composed of eleven members. A percentage of the revenues is paid to the beneficiaries each year. Every change (e.g., adding or removing beneficiaries) requires a constitutional amendment. A percentage of the income from renewable sources such as rentals for agriculture and business pays for administration, restoration, and remediation; the rest goes directly to the beneficiaries.

Garcia Richard said that 2019-2021 saw record breaking revenue generation of over \$1 billion

each year. Part of the increase is due to President Biden's temporary moratorium on leasing federal land for drilling, making state land more attractive. Another factor is the low cost of operating in the Permian Basin. However, she does not think the boom will last; we need to diversify now because we are unlikely to recover from the next bust. Furthermore, Garcia Richard believes the state should be receiving a larger share of the profits. For that reason, she has tried to get the legislature to raise the royalty rate from 20% to 25%, which is the current rate in Texas. That goal is one of her priorities.

Another priority is to triple the amount of renewable energy produced on State Trust Land during her first term. She created the Office of Renewable Energy and already renewable energy has increased from 400 megawatts to over 900. In 20 months, four large wind farms have been built. Pending projects could power the whole state and new electric lines could send additional power west.

Further diversification includes economic development. The legislature recently lengthened lease terms from 25 to 40 years for projects of public benefit such as mixed use planned communities.

As a good steward of the State Trust Land, Garcia Richard is focused on enforcement and accountability. She is requiring companies to remediate before they are allowed to renew a lease. Twenty wells have been plugged. One of her priorities is to close the bonding gap, which a study identified as \$8.1 billion for costs to clean up oil and gas.

The State Land Office spends \$2 million a year to remediate the land. They now have a landscape scale planner who will promote regenerative agriculture, habitat restoration, mine site reclamation, invasive species mitigation, and

collaboration with other organizations to improve the sustainability of the State Trust Lands.

*Barbara Calef*

## **Recycling Plastic Bags**

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 4,200,000 *tons* of plastic bags, sacks, and wraps were generated in 2018 (the most recent data available). Of this amount, 740,000 tons were combusted with energy recovery and a staggering 3,040,000 tons ended up in landfills. Only 420,000 tons - 10 percent - were recycled.

Kroger, the parent company of Smith's, our community's largest grocer, plans to eliminate single-use plastic bags by 2025 (Natural Grocers has not used plastic bags since 2009 and they are not used at our local Co-Op). What can we do in the meantime? Recycle them!

The blue recycling bin, which is picked up bi-monthly by the county, cannot accept single use plastic bags because they clog the machines. But these single use plastic bags can be recycled! You can simply set up a separate recycling container for plastic packaging. When this container is full, bring it to Smith's and put it in the appropriate bin at the front of the store. Smith's then combines these plastics with other plastic packaging they use in the store. All of these materials are then made into composite decking.

What single use plastic bags can be recycled? Grocery and retail shopping bags (receipts, hard plastic, and string handles removed); food storage bags (clean Ziploc, produce, and bread bags); dry-cleaning bags; newspaper sleeves and bags; package overwrap (toilet paper, napkins, paper towels, diapers, etc.); case stretch wrap (bulk snack and beverage); plastic cereal box liners (unless it tears like paper); and shipping



materials including bubble wrap, air pillows (deflated) and plastic shipping envelopes (labels removed, if possible). NONE of these recyclable plastic materials belong in your blue bin - they must be recycled through the bins at Smith's.

Recycling is easy and free - and it will help save the world!

*Rebecca Chaiken*

## **LWVLA Board of Directors 2021-2022**

### Officers:

- Co-president: Barbara Calef
- Co-president: Rebecca Shankland
- 1st Vice-President: *Unfilled*
- 2nd Vice-President: Ellen Mills
- Secretary: Rebecca Chaiken
- Treasurer: Rosmarie Frederickson

### Directors:

- BPU Observer: Julie Williams-Hill
- Director at Large: Addie Jacobson
- Director at Large: Felicia Orth
- Director at Large: Akkana Peck
- Fundraising: Ellen Mills
- Lunch with a Leader: Karyl Ann Armbruster
- Publicity: Jody Benson
- Reservations: Amy Birnbaum
- Voter Services: Lynn Jones

### Off-board Directors:

- Arrangements: Wendy Swanson
- County Council Observers: LWVLA Board & League Members
- Membership: Jean Dewart & Dotty Reilly
- Newsletter Editor: JoAnn Lysne
- Nominations: Ellen Mills, Leslie Wallstrom, & JoAnn Lysne
- Special Projects: Maxine McReynolds
- Webmaster: Julie Williams-Hill

If you would like to join the League, fill out and submit the membership form on page 7, or visit [www.lwvlosalamos.org](http://www.lwvlosalamos.org).

# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LOS ALAMOS

## MEMBERSHIP FORM



Mail to: LWV Los Alamos  
P.O. Box 158  
Los Alamos, NM 87544

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Check here to receive our local newsletter Update as an electronic file, saving us postage.

\_\_\_\_ OR Check here if you prefer the newsletter mailed in hard copy.

\_\_\_\_ Check here to receive occasional friendly reminders of upcoming events by e-mail.

**Membership Categories: all checks for memberships and contributions should be payable to LWV-Los Alamos and all are now tax-deductible. Let us know if you'd like a tax-deductible statement. If you prefer to pay via Paypal, visit [www.lwvlosalamos.org](http://www.lwvlosalamos.org).**

\_\_\_\_ Single membership: \$45

\_\_\_\_ Household membership (two+ people at the same address): \$70

\_\_\_\_ Single Sustaining membership: \$75

\_\_\_\_ Household Sustaining membership (two+ people at the same address): \$95

\_\_\_\_ Student membership: \$0 (must be 16 or over)

\_\_\_\_ Contribution to support League work: \$\_\_\_\_\_

### Interests and Ways to Help the League (check as many as apply)

#### Topics of Interest

- \_\_\_\_ Affordable Housing
- \_\_\_\_ Local Government
- \_\_\_\_ Education
- \_\_\_\_ Elections, Voting Rights
- \_\_\_\_ Water Issues
- \_\_\_\_ Land Use
- \_\_\_\_ Health Care
- \_\_\_\_ Money in Politics
- \_\_\_\_ Sustainability
- \_\_\_\_ Living Wage
- \_\_\_\_ Public Transportation
- \_\_\_\_ Environment
- \_\_\_\_ Other topics (please suggest):  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Ways to Help with League Activities

- \_\_\_\_ Set up Refreshments at Forums
- \_\_\_\_ Observer Corps (County Council, BPU, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_ Nominating Committee
- \_\_\_\_ Voter Guides Committee
- \_\_\_\_ Voter Registration
- \_\_\_\_ Publicity
- \_\_\_\_ Website, Social Media
- \_\_\_\_ Newsletter
- \_\_\_\_ Membership
- \_\_\_\_ Fund-raising
- \_\_\_\_ Budget Committee for LWV
- \_\_\_\_ Lunch with a Leader (assistance)
- \_\_\_\_ Fund-raising Committee for LWV
- \_\_\_\_ Participate in board meetings or join board

*The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy*

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