



UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

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www.lwvlosalamos.org

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Calendar

- November 8 LWVLA discussion of LWVC criminal justice position, Zoom, 7 p.m.
- November 18 Lunch with a Leader, Katie Leonard, Zoom, noon
- December 6 Estimated start of the special legislative session on redistricting
- December 9 Board Meeting, Zoom, noon
- December 11 LWVNM Advocacy Workshop, Zoom, 10 a.m. to noon

Lunch with a Leader: Katie Leonard of the LARES Task Force

Our November Lunch with a Leader will be held via Zoom on November 18 from noon-1pm. Our speaker will be Katie Leonard, Chair of the Los Alamos Resiliency, Energy, and Sustainability Task Force. Established in January of 2021, the LARES Task Force serves as an advisory body to the County Council on ways for the County as a whole, including government, businesses, and residents, to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions and to advance other sustainable practices in the face of climate change.

Leonard graduated from Los Alamos High School in 2001. She attended Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, and has Bachelors degrees in History and French as well as a Masters of Teaching.

Leonard was a high school French teacher for 13 years and has lived and taught English in France three times. She is passionate about environmental issues. She lives with her husband and their one-year-old son, Fox, in Los Alamos.

Karyl Ann Armbruster

Co-president's Message: The Citizens Speak! Results on Ballot Integrity and Reel Deal Purchase

The League of Women Voters' recent library display in the Step Up Gallery had two ballot boxes so that visitors could practice their voting skills. After the exhibit closed, we counted the ballots and recorded the comments.

One ballot box asked, **“Does the United States grant its citizens equal access to the ballot box?”**

The results?

YES 18

NO 86

Interestingly, the comments indicated that even the YES voters were worried:

“Yes, but community barriers, not enough volunteers, and other circumstances limit some minority, impoverished, and smaller communities.”

The NO voters were emphatic in their comments:

“Counties and states limit access to voters by limiting early voting, weekend voting, poll hours as well as not having enough polling locations....”

“Recent state voter suppression laws, TX, GA, AZ, etc. I vote ‘yes’ in support of Lewis Voting Act now before Congress.”

“The 2020 election came the closest to equal access. That has now been stripped away in many states.”



The second ballot box asked, **“Should the County buy the Reel Deal Theater?”**

And the winner is?

YES 76

NO 25

UNSURE 2

Again, the comments revealed an engaged, informed, and passionate electorate:

“Entertainment is an important part of a society.”

“YES! YES! YES!! Young people need more things to do in this town and it is safe!”

“If we are going to complain about the lack of businesses in downtown then we need to do something about it.”

The NO comments were also thoughtful:

“I hope it is acquired privately, to become an arts space.”

“I think no because they might do the same thing they did to the old Smith’s (nothing).”

Those who voted on November 2 had no chance to express their reasons for their votes. But the League hopes you will always think about your reasons every time you cast a ballot.

Becky Shankland

Observer Corps Reports

County Council

October 5

All Councilors were present - six in-person, with Councilor Scott attending remotely.

The Council attended to proclamations and presentations before addressing the consent calendar, which included the appointment of Julie Ruud, Manager of the Comfort Inn, to the Lodgers’ Tax Advisory Board.

No action was taken at this meeting on the business portion of the agenda, which included a presentation of changes to the Local Economic Development Act and the draft of Module 1 of the Chapter 16 Development Code presentation.

Councilor Williams recused himself from the presentation and discussion of modifications to the Local Economic Development Act. In their discussion Councilors were concerned about transparency in the procedure to obtain LEDA assistance for development.

From the Chapter 16 Development Code presentation, Module 1 is the first building block of multiple modules that Council will subsequently review. Once this module is approved, according to the consultants’

presentations, it should not be reviewed again. It is therefore important that objections to what is proposed in the new code be presented now.

The current number of zoning districts will be reduced. A base district designates the primary type of land use while an overlay district provides for additional protection or more regulations than are included in the base district.

There are more changes to the non-residential zoning districts than to the current residential and mixed-use districts in the plan presented by the consultants.

Councilors asked questions about the Development Code.

Councilor Williams noted that the County Advisory Committee selection and meetings were not transparent. Additionally, there were no restaurant, retail, or personal services community members serving on the committee.

Consolidation of the present Wilderness designations in Module 1 received the most public comment, and the comments were in opposition to Module 1’s recommendation of consolidation.

In Board & Commission reports:

- **Environmental Sustainability:** Councilor Williams noted that that herbicide usage by the County would be discussed at the next meeting and the Board’s decision would then be referred to the Council.
- Councilor Scott reported on the following: JJAB, Community Development Advisory Board, Planning & Zoning, Racial Equity & Inclusivity Task Force.

- County Manager Lynne introduced two newly appointed Deputy County Managers, Anne Laurent and Linda Matteson.

Council Chair Ryti informed the Council that he would be attending COP-26 in Glasgow, Scotland, and vice-chair Robinson would be chairing meetings in his absence.

A sub-committee of the Council that looked at redistricting presented their recommendation. In a vote of 6-1, the Council approved forwarding the recommendation to the State Redistricting Commission.

In the Councilor comment portion of the meeting, Councilor Williams expressed the opinion that the goal-setting meeting for the County Manager should be held in a public session instead of a closed session, as had been done earlier in the evening.

Adelaide Jacobson

October 19

This County Council meeting was held in person and was open to the public; it was also available via Zoom.

Beverly Simpson, the County Emergency Manager, gave a COVID-19 update. Los Alamos is still the most vaccinated population in New Mexico, but nevertheless we joined every other county in the state in the red zone (having a high percentage of cases). County Manager Steven Lynne reported on the county's efforts to improve communication regarding the pandemic within the county and region. One interesting item he reported is that although our local hospital, LAMC, is not in crisis mode, the surrounding hospitals are. That means that transfers that would normally take place from LAMC to other hospitals may not be possible because those

hospitals are full. Our Public Health Office is no longer offering COVID-19 testing, but is offering vaccinations. He also said that future Council meetings would be held via Zoom due to the pandemic.

Patrick Suddath, the new Superintendent of Bandelier, was introduced. He spoke about the good relationship between our County and Bandelier, and said that he felt it was a model for other places.

The United Church's Chapel is being designated a Local Historic Landmark. It was originally dedicated in 1947, and has been used by Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities.

Lynn Jones

October 26

The October 26 County Council Work Session was conducted virtually. Bernadine Goldman, Chair of the five-member Personnel Board, explained that the County Code established the board to advise in the administration of the County's personnel program, including the compensation system and employee communications. The board also serves in an appellate capacity as needed, provides citizen input regarding the personnel program, and reports annually to the Council.

The second presentation was the annual report of the Lodgers' Tax Advisory Board (LTAB), presented by Chair Linda Deck. That board is also supposed to have five members, but currently, the public is not represented. There are two tourism representatives; Linda Deck for the Bradbury Science Museum and Katie Bruell for PEEC. The two lodging representatives are Matt Allen for Pueblo Canyon Inn and Galleries and Julie Ruud for Comfort Inn & Suites. The board is responsible for advising and responding to



A view from the October 19 County Council meeting where it was announced that Council meetings would be moved back to virtual formatting due to COVID-19 concerns. Access to public meetings in Los Alamos can be found at <https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>.

County Council regarding Lodgers' Tax matters and conveying public input to staff regarding expenditures.

Deck explained that Lodgers' Tax is 5% of the base room rate for an overnight stay. The funds are used only for projects, promotions, events, and services that benefit tourists and residents. Of course, the revenue declined significantly in 2020 due to the lockdown but is rebounding now.

Deck explained that the County Lodgers' Tax ordinance needs to be updated due to the rise of short-term rentals (e.g., Air B&Bs), which need to be defined and addressed. She then described the various services that the board procures and the materials they produce, such as the visitor guide and brochures.

Following the LTAB report, Housing Programs Manager Margaret Ambrosino explained that the topic of short-term rentals (STRs) was separated from the ongoing Development Code Update project "due to the complexity and fluid nature of the legislation's interpretation, as well as the number of County departments impacted (e.g.,

CDD, Finance, Attorney's Office)." In April the Council approved an STR study designed to update the Lodgers' Tax ordinance and create a separate ordinance addressing short-term rentals. The Development Code is silent on the subject at present. The County will hire a consultant and public comment will be sought prior to any decision. Meanwhile, there are already at least 25 STRs operating in the County.

Barbara Calef

Board of Public Utilities

The Board of Public Utilities (BPU) met virtually on October 20. Utilities Manager Philo Shelton briefed the BPU members on the Carbon Free Power Project to build a next-generation nuclear power plant utilizing small modular reactors. He reported specifically that the core borings and geotechnical investigations are halfway completed and that the findings look favorable for the project. He also reported that the hearing examiner on the PNM/Avangrid merger case will make a recommendation to the Public Regulatory Commission in November.

After a presentation from the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) staff that project bids for the replacement White Rock wastewater treatment plant were well above the DPU budget authority, BPU members voted unanimously to approve ordinance 712 and forward it to the County Council for consideration. Material and labor shortages, as well as supply chain delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic, were given as an explanation for the higher than anticipated bids. If approved by the Council, the ordinance would authorize the utilities manager to request that the DPU loan amount with the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) be increased from \$17 million to a maximum of \$30 million for the construction of a replacement facility. Councilors will consider the ordinance at the November 9, 2021, council meeting.

Julie Williams-Hill

October Lunch with a Leader: Marcela Diaz

Marcela Diaz has been the executive director of Somos Un Pueblo Unido since 1998. She spoke at the LWVLA Legislative Preview in 2013 about the campaign to allow undocumented immigrants to receive driver's licenses. During the one-hour LWL program this October, she raced through the many programs and achievements of this grassroots immigration organization, which has 2,500 members.

State-wide, 9.4% of the population is foreign-born. The percentage of immigrants is highest in Luna, Doña Ana, Lea, Chaves, and Santa Fe counties. The increase of immigrants in the southeast corner of the state is recent; in Lea County, 17% is foreign-born. Most of the members of Somos work in hospitality, restaurants, landscaping, housekeeping, child care, construction, and oil and gas.

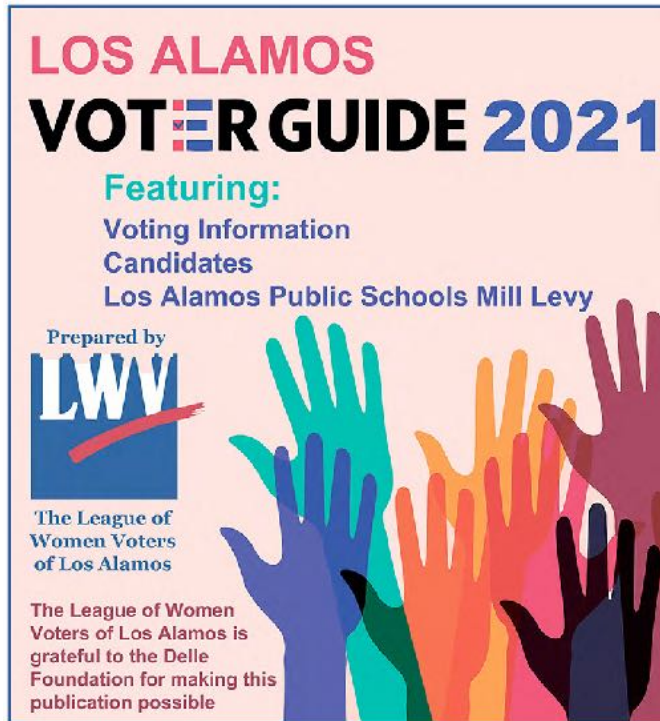
Somos has a robust citizenship program that streamlines services and is especially active in southeastern New Mexico. Fifty-five thousand immigrants in the state are eligible to become citizens, but many do not know how to engage in the process. Somos developed a program in Spanish to help them. The group also promotes voter engagement and is taking an active role in redistricting. As Diaz said, "Workers need to be able to elect people who serve their interests." Somos supports Map H for congressional districts and Map E for House districts. (See the maps at <https://www.nmredistricting.org/adopted-maps/>) Somos participates in the Fair Immigration Reform Movement, which is pushing for legalization for Dreamers, agricultural workers, and essential workers.

The pandemic has exacerbated the challenges for immigrant families. Undocumented workers were not eligible for federal CARES Act stimulus checks despite the fact that they pay taxes. About 35,000 families were excluded. Diaz explained that rental assistance was not necessary. What they needed was cash assistance, paid directly to individuals. Somos achieved success during the 2020 Special Session when the legislature made \$7 million of CARES funding available to the Human Services Department (HSD) for cash relief for families not eligible for the federal program. And in 2021 the legislature allocated \$5 million from the General Fund for HSD's emergency cash assistance program. The cash transfers went to 20,000 families with payments ranging from \$465 to \$3000 for a total of \$16,425,750 distributed by local, state, and federal sources.

In 2021 the legislature expanded the Working Families' Tax Credit to undocumented immigrants and increased funds for the Low-Income Tax Rebate. Somos continues to work for all low-income families, not just immigrants. Their goals include reforming the traditional

safety net system, raising wages, reforming anti-donation restrictions, including immigrants in state unemployment programs, and gaining access to state ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act of 2021) funding.

Barbara Calef



The LWVLA published both physical and virtual (vote411.org) Voter Guides for the November 2021 election. Demand for the VG exceeded expectations, and planning has begun on how to meet the needs of voters in the next election.

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: Adelaide 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 8, or visit 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.

____ 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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