

LWVML OC Mid-Year Report July 2025

Observer Corps members of the League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode (LWVML) monitor the meetings of local agencies. A nonpartisan organization, the League of Women Voters has been a champion of government transparency since our founding in 1920. It is one of our core principles and is a vital part of our mission. Our Observer Corps carries out this mission by monitoring the meetings of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, Sonora City Council, and Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD). We attend their meetings and report back to the League about issues facing our community. We follow the issues, the decisions, and the processes. On a semi-annual basis we share our findings with the public and the agencies. The following is our mid-year report.

In reviewing our findings, we have chosen to focus on three areas: Budget, Process, and Homelessness. An effective operating budget is essential for any agency to function well. Process, the manner in which a board conducts itself, includes parliamentary procedure, the Brown Act, and interactions of board members with each other, staff, and audience members. Our LWVML advocates actions to reduce and alleviate homelessness in our county. We monitor the effectiveness of the City and County in assisting our citizens in need of housing.

Beginning with budget, Sonora City Council, TUD, and County all have balanced budgets. Budget presentations and votes were clear and concise in City Council and TUD. Beginning in January, Board of Supervisors budget discussions were ongoing. The Board of Supervisors is experiencing budget challenges. Attempts to meet these challenges were addressed with budget cuts and staff layoffs. In May, Supervisors attempted to spend these projected savings with special projects, against the advice of staff. These clumsy attempts showed a lack of strategic planning.

A long-range plan can be a helpful budgeting tool. The city of Sonora has a 5-Year Strategic and Implementation Plan. TUD has a 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan. While we were able to locate 5 Year plans for multiple county departments, we did not see one for Tuolumne County. Having a long-range plan could help eliminate the kind of special project “horse trading” observed in budget meetings.

The Process in which a board conducts its meetings can be a reflection of the effectiveness of the board. The Brown Act is a California state law that mandates open and public meetings for all state agencies. It ensures transparency and accountability. All three agencies could benefit from an annual review of the Brown Act. We have observed potential violations in each agency. It is important that board members treat each other, staff, and the public with respect. We commend all three agencies for their treatment of the public. We have observed disrespect among some board and council members. Interrupting staff presentations and publicly reprimanding staff is inappropriate and lacks civility.

Our third topic, Homelessness, has been a community focus for a number of years. Both City Council and Board of Supervisors have taken positive steps to meet the needs of our homeless citizens. Both have purchased properties to be renovated for affordable housing. Both are exploring partnerships with nonprofit community groups in the renovation and operation of these properties. We applaud these actions. Further, we appreciate the Board of Supervisors' support of Camp Justice.

Sonora City Council members, the County Board of Supervisors, and TUD Directors have a responsibility to represent the community at large. As stewards of the public trust, they have an obligation to operate with full transparency. Ideally, all three agencies could strive to work cooperatively for the betterment of our community.