



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®**  
OF LOS ALAMOS

# UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos  
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## ***There will be no Lunch with a Leader in June***

### ***President's Message: Voter Education and Enjoyment at ChamberFest***

The LWVLA Board staffed a table at ChamberFest this year and found the event engaging.

- We gained at least three new memberships.
- We distributed dozens of Voter Guides to those who have not yet voted.
- We informed all adult visitors that there are just two days left to vote (June 1 - the last day of early voting, and June 4 - Election Day).
- We gave directions to the Municipal Building on multiple occasions.
- We asked children whether they knew the legal voting age and when they would reach that milestone. Quite a few knew and proudly told us they had discussed it in school.
- We distributed sweet treats and small oranges.
- We accepted thanks from several folks who appreciate the work we do in voter education.

One conversation stood out: a young man issued a challenge to "prove me wrong" that his vote in the primary election wouldn't matter. [If you watch the Daily Show, you know the vibe--comedian Ronny Chieng plays a contrarian on the streets, challenging passers-by with a sign that says, e.g., "Summer is the worst season," or "Valentine's Day is the worst holiday," and a second sign that says "Prove Me Wrong." People debate the topics with him sincerely while he makes jokes or concedes the point.]

I acknowledged that there were few truly contested races in the primary election regardless of party.

- On the Republican ballot, in what might be a contested race for President all but one candidate has suspended his or her campaign.
- On the Libertarian ballot, there is one contested race in the primary for the New Mexico legislature - District 43.
- On the Democratic ballot, there is more than one choice for President, and a pitched contest for First Judicial District Attorney.

When the young man seemed curious as to why he would care about who was in the DA's Office, I shared with him some of the issues raised during the May 9 League Candidate Forum at Fuller Lodge (neutrally!). While both candidates agreed that more should be done about addiction and mental health, they disagreed about the extent of and the causes of backlogs in progress with rape kits, DWI, homicides, and other cases. They disagreed about whether a special prosecutor should be put under contract to handle a celebrity movie set shooting resulting in death. They disagreed on their records regarding how they served Los Alamos County, Santa Fe County, and Sandoval County.

I found the interaction gratifying, because at the close of my explanation he said, "Well, you convinced me," and grabbed a Voter Guide.

*Felicia Orth*



*Felicia Orth, League president, moderates the candidate forum. Photo by Maire O'Neill.*



*Phil Gursky discusses housing with Council Chair Denise Derkacs while Barbara Calef looks on. Photo by Maire O'Neill.*

# **Observer Corps Report – County Council – May 7, 2024**

## *Metropolitan Redevelopment Area Designation*

The regular session was attended in person by Chair Denise Derkacs, and Councilors Melanee Hand, David Reagor, and remotely by Vice Chair Theresa Hull and Councilors Keith Lepsch and Randall Ryti. Councilor Suzie Havemann was absent. Our observer report is based on discussion during the meeting and documentation provided in the full agenda package.

## **Public Hearing on East Downtown Los Alamos MRA Boundaries**

### *Designated MRA Boundaries*

The purpose of the hearing was to determine whether or not to approve designating the eastern part of Downtown Los Alamos as an MRA (Metropolitan Redevelopment Area), as proposed by the Community Development Department (CDD).

The concepts of the proposal were introduced to Council on 12/5/23, with a preliminary designation area presented to Council on 2/20/24 [see January and March 2024 issues of LWVLA *Update*.]

An MRA is an area that a city or county has prioritized for economic and physical reinvestment based on findings of deteriorated or blighted conditions. The Designation Area must be approved by a city or county council.

Sobia Sayeda, the CDD's Planning Manager, and Helen Ganahl, a consultant from Groundwork Studio, presented a map of the proposed MRA boundary. The area includes approximately 21 parcels in a 29-acre portion of downtown Los Alamos. The parcels include the Mari Mac shopping center, the former Hilltop House site, apartment buildings on the north side of Central Avenue, and commercial properties on the southeast side of Trinity Drive, including the retention pond on a County parcel next to Smith's Marketplace.

Justification for the boundary is provided in an MRA Designation Report prepared for the County by Groundwork Studio, New Mexico MainStreet, and Los Alamos MainStreet and Creative District. The report explains that the MRA designation is intended to address the low economic activity, housing shortage, disproportionate number of vacant commercial properties, and blighted conditions present in this area.

### *MRA as an Economic Development Tool*

Paul Andrus, CDD Director, explained that the designation of an MRA is intended to help catalyze reinvestment in the area by allowing public resources to be contributed to private redevelopment projects, such as through the creation of Public-Private Partnerships.

Andrus emphasized that such partnerships do not violate the Anti-donation Clause of the New Mexico Constitution. These public-private projects are guided by development agreements and require tangible community benefit in order to be approved.

The MRA designation makes Los Alamos eligible for financial and technical assistance. To help eliminate conditions of blight, the tools made available to municipalities include the ability to acquire land, assist in land assembly, offer financial incentives, and provide public improvements to encourage and promote industry, trade, or other economic activity.

### *The Next Step*

Once Council approves the MRA designation, Ganahl said that the next step is for the County to create an MRA Plan that identifies specific redevelopment projects intended to help stimulate business and community building activity. Development of the MRA Plan will include public engagement and community workshops, she said.

The Council will then need to conduct a public hearing on that plan to consider its approval. Following adoption, any of the projects identified in the Plan would only be allowed to proceed with approval by the Council and MRA Board.

Ganahl noted that White Rock already has a designated MRA, approved by Council at its meeting on October 18, 2022 [see November 2022 issue of the LWVLA *Update*]. But not much has happened there and the goal is to implement some of those goals at the same time.

### *Council Questions*

Questions from Councilors Reagor and Ryti focused on the underlying rationale for including some specific parcels within the MRA boundaries.

The proposed MRA includes the traffic roundabout east of the Hilltop House site. Councilor Reagor pointed out that the roundabout is State Highway property. "Why is that included?" he asked. Ganahl explained that, "Partly we tried to follow parcel boundaries, whenever possible. ... We also oftentimes include right-of-way, in case there are utility issues or infrastructure that needs to be addressed in the future that can be helped by an MRA." She added that the inclusion of the roundabout was not to imply that it needs any kind of improvements.

Ganahl said that Council could choose to revise the boundaries of the designated MRA. However, County Attorney Alvin Leaphart advised Council that doing so would require readvertisement and another public hearing for the amended proposal.

Councilor Reagor asked why the proposed northern MRA boundary is drawn at Iris Street; the MRA includes apartment buildings south of Iris along Central Avenue but excludes those on the north side of Iris Street. "Are there any substantial differences between those buildings?" he asked.

Ganahl replied that the boundaries were drawn with input and guidance from the Los Alamos MainStreet and Creative District. The MRA encompasses properties on both sides of Central Avenue because they are visible in that gateway entrance into Los Alamos. "We didn't want to extend the boundary too far because we knew that maybe we should start small, given that Council would have lots of questions, and that this is sort of ... a test run,"

said Ganahl. "Our rationale was to focus on a small area." Ganahl conceded that the apartments are in good condition and well-maintained, but they are over 70 years old.

### *Public Comments*

Several members of the public spoke. Most emphasized that they were in favor of designating an East Downtown Los Alamos MRA because they hoped it would indeed spur redevelopment of blighted properties in the area. However, objections were raised to the inclusion of specific properties within the MRA boundary.

Most objections related to the inclusion of apartment properties on the north side of Central Avenue. Residents living in the adjacent neighborhoods pointed out that the apartment buildings did not meet any of the criteria required by State Statute for inclusion in an MRA, which are conditions of blight, aged infrastructure, and low occupancy rates.

Local residents expressed concern about the potential for encroachment of downtown into a residential neighborhood. "The apartments now have open green spaces, and that fits with the neighborhood," said Barbara Carlos. "I am really worried about losing the residential feeling."

Resident Sandy Walters commented that the apartments should remain as a buffer between the development planned at the Mari Mac site and the neighborhood to the north. "Leave the apartments and leave the neighborhoods alone," she said, "and concentrate on what is really the blight in Los Alamos."

Resident George Chandler expressed concern that including the apartments in the MRA increased the risk of losing these affordable housing units through redevelopment. He pointed out that the eight buildings included within the MRA boundary contain 104 one-bedroom or studio apartments. "If you build something else there, you've lost 104 units of affordable housing," he said.

Chandler said that affordable housing currently could only be built with heavy

subsidies, as is the case for the Canyon Walk and the Bluffs Apartments. "So, you need to protect those apartments because you can't replace them."

Dr. Lisa Shin, a small business owner and secretary of the 800 Trinity Condo Association, expressed strong objections to including 800 Trinity in the MRA. "I just want you to understand that, as a Condo Association, we pay dues and we take care of our own maintenance and repairs. So, we really don't need this type of assistance to maintain our building. We are not vacant, we are not underutilized, we don't have low levels of commercial activity. ... It's not in poor condition or out of date. ... So, I do feel that if this building were included in the MRA, it would not strengthen local business activity, ... and it would not launch new businesses."

A different perspective was offered by Jeff Johnson and Susan Schillaci, who own the 9th Street apartments, just outside of the current map for the MRA. "If the MRA is an opportunity for property owners to tap into some sort of resources, then I would suggest that the County either remove all of the apartments from the current map, or include all of the older apartments in the downtown area so that it would be then an opportunity for all the people that own property, the lower-rent apartments in the downtown area. ... From what I think I understand, if your property is included in the map, it doesn't necessarily mean you have to do anything but .... I think it means you do have the potential opportunity to access funding and opportunities that the County would provide to the MRA."

Lauren McDaniel, Executive Director of LACDC (Los Alamos Commerce & Development Corporation), spoke up to clarify a few points that had been raised.

"Assistance is not required for those who are included in the MRA boundaries," said McDaniel. "It just opens up potential opportunities for Public-Private Partnerships. That does not mean that any of the property owners need to take advantage of, or propose a project to the MRA Board. It just gives them the opportunity to do so."

McDaniel pointed out that the inclusion of the apartments in the MRA can be a mechanism to help keep them affordable. "If you're talking about how affordable housing often looks at subsidies, this essentially would be a Public-Private Partnership opportunity for the apartment owners to tap into public funds to help with utilities, infrastructure improvements, that the property owners themselves would not have to take on. And that again helps keep the apartments affordable."

Finally, McDaniel reminded people that, just because a property owner in the MRA proposes a project in the MRA Plan, that does not mean that their project will be approved by the Council and MRA Board. "It could be a situation where the MRA Board says this does not meet our criteria, and the project for public funding could be rejected," she said. "So, there are multiple mechanisms and protections in place, to make sure that there is a community benefit to any Public-Private Partnership opportunity that is presented."

### *Council Discussion*

In expressing her support of the motion, Councilor Hand said that, "Basically, I don't want to change the current proposal because it's going to cause us to move backwards. And we really want that blighted area to be taken care of."

Vice Chair Cull said that, although Council could propose to change the boundaries and bring back the MRA designation at a future date, she did not think that was necessary. "I think ... that there's enough safeguards, you might say, in the process, and there's still a lot of opportunity in the process to define this."

Councilor Ryti said, "I would like to see the proper justification provided in the documents, so the next time we see the tools, we actually understand why the area was designated as this because there are areas that are totally not blighted that are included. ... I'm not entirely pleased with the documentation we have on the map but I'll be willing to support this as it is, just to continue to make progress. But I just hope we can have some better information."

Casting the only vote in opposition, Councilor Reagor said, "I'm still puzzled by this, that we can't find a single person who showed up that's inside this boundary and advocates for it. ... Where are the people that want it here that are not in County government and are not its consultants? ... I don't see the reason to vote for it."

Voting 5–1, with Councilor Reagor opposed and Councilor Havemann absent, Council adopted a resolution designating a portion of East Downtown Los Alamos as a Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA).

### *Local News Coverage*

*Los Alamos Daily Post*, Kirsten Laskey, May 9, 2024, Council Approves MRA Boundaries For Downtown East.

<https://ladailypost.com/council-approves-mra-boundaries-for-downtown-east/>

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## **Observer Corps Report – Planning & Zoning Commission – May 8, 2024**

The Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Commission meeting was attended in person by Chair Rachel Adler, Vice Chair Stephanie Nakhleh, and Commissioner David Hampton. Commissioners Katherine Bruell and Rebecca White attended the meeting via Zoom. Commissioners Karen Easton and Benjamin Hill were absent.

### **Applications to Split a Parcel into Several Parcels**

By a vote of 5-0, the Commission approved two separate applications for subdivision plats that each split a single parcel into several separate parcels. These applications are considered as infill residential development because each property lies within, or is

surrounded by, existing residential neighborhoods.

- Final subdivision plat to split the parcel at 2488 45th Street, in the North Community 1 neighborhood, into four parcels. The fourplex that previously existed on this now-vacant lot was burned in the Cerro Grande Fire in 2000. The owner of the property, Holmann Brand, intends to sell the vacant lots individually for residential development.
- Preliminary subdivision plat to split the undeveloped parcel at 1060 San Ildefonso Road into five parcels, in Area No. 3 North Mesa. The property abuts Tsikumu Village to the north and Pueblo Canyon Cliffs subdivision to the south and east. The owner of the property, Sam Gardner (dba Western Construction, Inc.), intends to sell four of the five vacant lots individually for residential development.

The preliminary subdivision plat application for the steep property on San Ildefonso was approved subject to the condition that the final application address all of the issues identified by the County Engineer, including a detailed drainage and grading plan.

### **Parking Requirements and Regulations**

By a vote of 5-0, the Commission approved a motion presented by Commissioner Hampton, as amended by Chair Adler, to address its concern about parking requirements and regulations in the County. The primary impetus for the motion was the concern that excessive parking requirements present an impediment to "increasing the capacity for new housing development and the amount and variety of housing types, ... particularly middle- and lower-income households."

In part, the motion directs the Los Alamos County Community Development staff to consider eliminating parking requirements or to change requirements to recommendations. The motion also directs staff to examine the requirements regarding accessory dwelling

units to see if existing limitations discourage development of additional units.

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## **Observer Corps Report - County Council May 21, 2024**

### *County Open Space, Nuisance Code, Atomic City Transit*

This work session was attended by Chair Denise Derkacs, Vice Chair Theresa Cull, and Councilors Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, David Reagor, and Randall Ryti. Councilor Keith Lepsch attended virtually. Our observer report is based on discussion during the meeting and documentation provided in the full agenda package.

### **Supporting County Open Space**

In her briefing to Council, Rachel Adler, Chair of the Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Commission, focused on what had been completed, what they are currently working on, and what challenges or opportunities they see coming up in the future.

Councilor Ryti had follow up questions about activities he did not see listed in the P&Z's draft Work Plan for FY24. Chief among these was rezoning of County-owned open space parcels whose current zoning is inconsistent with their existing uses. For example, the northern half of the Golf Course is zoned as Passive Use Open Space.

Ryti noted that this issue had been brought up several times during the revision of the County's Chapter 16 Development Code, which was adopted on 12/13/22, and that the issue was raised again in a letter submitted to Council by the LWVLA in February 2024 [see March 2024 issue of the LWVLA *Update*].

"Is it actually on the list?" Ryti asked. "Because I had heard some different

information about whether or not it was actively being pursued at this moment."

CDD Director Paul Andrus replied that CDD was actively looking at the open space rezoning issues, noting that input from other Boards will also be required. Andrus said this effort would be led together with Cory Styron, Director of the Community Services Department, in conjunction with other CSD planning processes underway. Andrus said that he would be submitting a plan to the County Manager in the next week or so setting forth a process and schedule for addressing the rezoning issue.

Andrus emphasized that any proposed rezoning of open space was ultimately going to require the community to balance competing values for ways to use those parcels. "When you downzone something, it prohibits other types of uses," he said. "And I think that's the question that staff have right now. If you downzone something to a passive use, that implies that you can't do certain things on that, like, certain improvements or certain types of uses that would still constitute open space uses. So, we're going to have to work through that and have that conversation because we've got people who really want active uses, they want to be able to bike, they want to be able to do certain of those things, and then we have others who don't want to do any of those sorts of things."

### **Nuisance Code Implementation Review**

The final findings and recommendations of the Nuisance Code Implementation Review Task Force were presented to Council by Task Force Chair Philip Gursky. The Task Force was formed in response to concerns surrounding the adoption of the Nuisance Code on 11/29/2022 at the end of a contentious public hearing [see December issue of the LWVLA *Update*]. The new Code went into effect on January 7, 2023, and the Task Force was charged with assessing its implementation and effectiveness through January 6, 2024.

Based on extensive documentation and analysis by the five-member team, Gursky

reported that the consensus of the Task Force was that the implementation of the Nuisance Code has been relatively smooth, and that the new requirements and responsibilities of the Code have alleviated nearly all of the issues that plagued the Code that it replaced. Further, he noted that the CDD process of enforcing the new Code has resulted in virtual elimination of citizen complaints about the Nuisance Code.

In its report, the Task Force found that there were some areas for improvement in the process, as well as provisions in the Code where ambiguities and concerns still exist. Several of those recommendations have already been implemented by the CDD.

## **Atomic City Transit Staffing and Priorities**

Public Works Director Juan Rael discussed the present status of Atomic City Transit (ACT) operations and routes, focusing on staffing issues and asking for Council's priorities in regard to the Bandelier shuttle and weekend services.

Due to staffing shortages, said Rael, three bus routes are currently suspended. A full staff would include 32 full-time drivers, including drivers for morning and afternoon shifts. However, ATC is short 9 positions, including 6 limited-term positions for the summer Bandelier service.

Rael said staffing issues have prevented them from initiating the Micro Transit pilot program that Council had funded in the County's FY2020 budget to provide Saturday service. "When we're turning off our existing routes, turning on weekend routes is very difficult," he said.

Rael asked Council for discussion and guidance on priorities pertaining to the proposed Micro Transit weekend service versus providing the Bandelier weekend shuttle service.

"Bandelier service is through a partnership that we have with the National Park Service," said Rael. "That service is able to provide folks a ride down to Bandelier from the White Rock Fire Station and then back up. Great service, it

provides a draw to the community. ... The Bandelier service adds a great deal to our ridership numbers and allows us to get a good share of State and Federal funding."

ATC currently plans to start its Bandelier service using existing staff. "We haven't been as successful as we have in recent years being able to hire limited-term drivers for the summer Bandelier service," said Rael, "so we'll have to stretch our existing staff because that is weekend service."

### *Council Questions*

Councilor Hand asked how the hiring situation could be improved. Rael replied that County management and ATC staff were actively working on it. "It's really in our opinion the starting pay because that is what people see when they are looking for a job," he said. He noted, however, that this is a nationwide problem for the industry and not unique to Los Alamos County. The problem is exacerbated for the County because the Lab pays its drivers as least 50% more.

To help articulate factors to be considered in setting transit service priorities, Councilor Havemann posed the question, "What would be the downsides of not having Bandelier service?" She enumerated several consequences. One is that ridership numbers go down, and that has ramifications for funding. Two is that visitors could be turned away when Bandelier's limited number of parking spots reaches capacity. Three is that, if that happens, ugly rumors go around that you can't get to Bandelier, you can't park, and then people don't come here, and we lose visitation. In addition to impacts on the County's tourism environment and benefits, she noted energy conservation and emission impacts as well as safety issues associated with not keeping people off the road.

Councilor Havemann asked what the financial consequences would be if ATC did not provide Bandelier shuttle services. Transit Manager James Barela said the National Park Service pays ATC about \$272K a year to provide the shuttle service, which translates to 15–20% of the ATC budget. Rael said that at



least 60% of the ATC operating budget comes from the state and federal grants it receives and are based on its ridership numbers. Without the grants, more County funds would be required to maintain the current level of service.

Councilor Havemann then listed the pros and cons of ATC's proposed weekend service. "That's just a service that we want to provide to our residents—and visitors maybe too—so that if they don't have a car, they've got some mobility options," she said. She asked whether there had been a lot of feedback from the community and complaints about not having weekend service. Rael replied that complaints have been received, although not many, but that most people understand that driver shortage is the cause.

Councilor Ryti said, "The fundamental issue is that we don't have enough drivers. ... [but] from a business standpoint, I don't see how we could not do the Bandelier shuttle."

Chair Derkacs added, "Bandelier service is important, we have to prioritize that. I encourage you to think outside the box to offer incentives to increase staffing...what I'm saying is be creative."

## **Bus Transit Center Sites in Los Alamos and White Rock**

Los Alamos County, in coordination with its transit partners, partnered with consulting firm Stantec to evaluate locations for potential new transit centers in Los Alamos and White Rock. The transit centers could provide connection between different bus services and could include NMDOT's Park and Ride, Atomic City Transit, and Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

Barb Berastegui of Stantec presented the evaluation criteria and initial assessment of nine potential sites for a primary and an auxiliary transit center in Los Alamos and White Rock.

Five possible sites for a primary transit center in Los Alamos are at TA-3 (on LANL property), Mesa Public Library, Deacon Street, 20th Street, and the Mari Mac Center. Four possible sites for an auxiliary transit center in

White Rock are at the intersection of Highway 4 and Pajarito Road (on LANL property), the White Rock Visitor Center, Bonnie View Drive, and Fire Station #3.

A public survey garnered about 800 responses, with the TA-3 and Mesa Public Library sites ranked highest in Los Alamos, and the Visitor Center site highest in White Rock.

Stantec's screening criteria included ranking each site based on adequate space and potential for bus circulation, relocation of existing uses, and cost. The ranking placed the Mari Mac location as the top preference. "Just because of its sheer size and opportunities, it scored number 1 in all three criteria," Berastegui said. But this site is also the farthest from LANL, which would increase travel times for employees.

The TA-3 and 20th Street locations tied at number 2. In White Rock, the Visitor Center location provided the most potential, although use of that site would require relocation of the popular RV park currently located there.

### *Councilor Questions*

Councilor Ryti said, while he understood the desire to have a transit center at some location other than TA-3, he was concerned about the effects on the selected transit center location on bus use by LANL employees. He pointed out that transporting LANL workers to downtown where they would then have to transfer to another bus to get to LANL would remove the attraction of riding the bus to work. "Most people ride the transit because it is very convenient to get to TA-3 because they work at LANL. I don't think there's enough weighting being done for LANL employees."

Berastegui responded, "Most of the comments from the LANL employees were, 'I won't take it because it will add time to my commute.' We want the center to make sense for LANL employees and also what makes sense for other transit users... It's not one or the other location, it could potentially be a combination."

County Manager Anne Laurent added, "In conversations with laboratory leadership, they

have stated that they want some kind of hub at TA-3, so that's kind of a given. Look at it as an 'and,' not an 'or.'”

Chair Derkacs asked “If LANL is willing to build a transit center at TA-3, why does the County need to build and pay for one? I’m struggling with some fundamental questions about even the need for a transit center.”

Berastegui explained that this was a preliminary assessment and that, in the next step, Stantec would evaluate each potential site based on ridership potential, connectivity with regional and local transit, traffic studies, and ease of construction. “It is a complicated problem. There are a lot of people that have a lot of transit needs.”

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## ***Observer Corps Report – County Council – May 28, 2024***

Nothing relevant to League issues was discussed at this meeting.

## ***May Lunch with a Leader: County Clerk Naomi Maestas***

Naomi Maestas has worked in the Office of the County Clerk since 2005. She was elected County Clerk in 2016 and won a second term in 2020. She cannot run for a third term, but hopes to continue doing similar work when her term ends because she is passionate about what she does. She is a member of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

Maestas is proud that MIT recently ranked New Mexico number one in the nation for its election system performance in 2022. She stressed the various security measures followed by her office. For instance, the equipment is subjected to logic and security testing before every election, a procedure that is open to the public. The tabulators are never online. The election tapes are printed on election night. One copy is posted in the Municipal Building, one copy is kept in the clerk's office, and one copy is mailed to the Office of the Secretary of State (SOS).

Maestas listed a number of election bills passed by the legislature this year. SB 108 created an election fund and allocated \$15 million to reimburse the SOS and the counties for the costs of statewide elections. SB 137 expands the range of school board members who must submit campaign finance reports. HB 182 amends the Campaign Reporting Act to make it a crime to distribute materially deceptive media. Finally, SB 5 bans people from carrying a firearm near polling places, with exceptions for police officers and people with a license to carry a concealed weapon.

In 2023 legislation was passed to enable eligible voters to opt in to a permanent absentee list to automatically be sent an absentee ballot for each statewide election. Voters can sign up for the permanent absentee list online at [NMVOTE.ORG](https://nmvote.org). (Voters are not eligible for the permanent absentee list if they want their ballot delivered to an out-of-state address.)

Maestas reassured her audience that absentee ballots are very secure. There is now a ballot tracker on the SOS website. There are many checks and balances from the collection of ballots from the drop boxes to the transfer to the Absentee Ballot Board. Once the ballots arrive at the County Clerk's office, they are checked off on the master list and dated and stored in a fireproof vault until they are processed on Election Day and again afterwards. The chain of custody is scrupulously followed. During the processing, the outer envelope is separated from the inner envelope before the ballot is removed from the inner envelope, so there is no link to the name of the voter.

Maestas said that AI can be used by anyone to create images, video, and audio. The SOS has launched an advertising campaign to combat misinformation during the election cycle. Check the SOS website to learn more. As Maestas said, "When in doubt, check it out."

To become a Voter Registration Agent, who is allowed to register voters, one can either watch a video at the Clerk's office or watch online at home and then go to the Clerk's office to sign an affidavit and pick up registration forms.

Both the Clerk's office and the SOS are also offering a different training--for potential challengers and watchers, to avoid the unruly behavior that has troubled some polling places in recent years.

On Election Day there will be five voter convenience centers (polling places): Betty Ehart Senior Center, UNMLA, the Golf Course, the Municipal Building, and the White Rock Town Hall. The switch from polling at each precinct to the vote centers has saved the County and State money and is a convenience because one may cast a ballot at any of the centers in the County.

The Clerk's office has contingency plans for every aspect of an election including fire, snowstorm, delays, evacuation. For instance, Maestas received a grant from the Emergency Management Director for a mobile voting unit in case of fire.

The Board of Registration serves as the Canvassing Committee, which certifies the election. The board also performs a biennial review of voter registration records. Maestas said that the board needs two more members. However, currently, all the Democrat positions are filled, so voters registered in a different party are needed.

In response to questions, Maestas cited some personal preferences. She would like New Mexico to switch to all mail-in voting because she believes the turn-out would be higher. She would like open primaries because about 30% of the registered voters in the state cannot currently participate in primary elections. If the primaries remain closed, she thinks the parties should pay for them. Also, she likes ranked choice voting.

Finally, Maestas said that her experience as County Clerk has given her the confidence to speak out, to believe she should be heard.

*Barbara Calef*

## **LWVLA Board of Directors 2024-2025**

### *Officers:*

- President: Felicia Orth
- 1st Vice-President: [open]
- 2nd Vice-President: Ellen Mills
- Past President, Editor: Barbara Calef
- Secretary: Rebecca Chaiken
- Treasurer: Addie Jacobson

### *Directors:*

- Lunch with a Leader: Karyl Ann Armbruster
- Newsletter Publisher; Archivist; Membership: Robert Williams
- Publicity: Jody Benson
- Voter Services/Voter Guide: Lynn Jones
- Community Health and Wellbeing: Lisa Hampton
- Reservations and Refreshments: Wendy Swanson
- Director at Large: Akkana Peck
- Director at Large/Newsletter Distributor: Becky Shankland



*LWV Los Alamos Board 2024-25: Addie Jacobson, Bob Williams, Rebecca Chaiken, Felicia Orth, Lisa Hampton, Jody Benson, Lynn Jones, Barbara Calef, Akkana Peck, Ellen Mills, Becky Shankland. Missing: Karyl Ann Armbruster, Wendy Swanson. Photo by Peg Dahl.*

# Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies

## Tickler Report

### Tentative Council Agenda Items as of May 28, 2024

This is a partial list of tentative Council agenda items in the County tickler that was distributed with the Council's agenda package for its May 28, 2024 session. All of the items are subject to change.

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI) Board/Task Force
  - Discussion and possible action requested at 6/11/24 meeting
- Citizen Petition: Four Actions to Improve Road & Pedestrian Safety in White Rock
  - Presentation at 6/11/24 meeting
- Affordable Housing Plan: Overview of Draft Plan
  - Presentation at 6/11/24 meeting
- Ordinance to Modify Chapter 6, Animal Code
  - Public Hearing and action requested at 6/11/24 meeting
- County Strategic Goal — Economic Vitality
  - Presentation at 6/18/24 meeting
- Española's Request for Regional Capital Funds
  - Presentation and possible action requested at 6/18/24 meeting
- Regional Report Quarterly Update
  - Presentation at 6/18/24 meeting
- DOE Environmental Management, Los Alamos Field Office
  - Presentation at 6/18/24 meeting

## County BCC Vacancies as of May 31, 2024

Los Alamos County has 11 standing Boards and Commissions (BCCs). Generally, the purpose of a board is to serve in an advisory capacity to the County Council, but some have statutory responsibilities as well.

All BCCs and current vacancies are below as of May 31, 2024.

Upcoming vacancies are in yellow text. Changes from last report have a magenta highlight.

- Art in Public Places Board 0
  - No terms ending soon
- Board of Public Utilities 0
  - No terms ending soon
- County Health Council 5
  - No terms ending soon
- Environmental Sustainability Board 0
  - Five terms ending July 31, 2024
- Historic Preservation Advisory Board 0
  - No terms ending soon
- Library Board 0
  - 3 terms ending Aug 31, 2024
- Lodgers' Tax Advisory Board 0
  - No terms ending soon
- Parks and Recreation Board 0
  - No terms ending soon
- Personnel Board 0
  - No terms ending soon
- Planning and Zoning Commission 2
  - No terms ending soon
- Transportation Board 3
  - No terms ending soon

Totals: 10 vacancies, 8 terms ending soon

Interested Los Alamos County residents may submit an online application by visiting the County's Boards and Commissions webpage and selecting "apply."

[https://www.losalamosnm.us/government/boards\\_\\_commissions](https://www.losalamosnm.us/government/boards__commissions)



## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

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

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone 1: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone 2: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail 2: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Categories:** All checks for memberships and contributions should be payable to LWV-Los Alamos and all are tax-deductible. Let us know if you'd like a tax-deduction statement. A substantial portion of Single and Household membership dues supports state and national League of Women Voters work.

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Household membership (two or more people at the same address): \$70.

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Student membership: Free (must be 16 or over).

\_\_\_\_\_ Additional donation to support the Los Alamos LWV work: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Newsletter Update** – Check here to receive it as an electronic file, saving postage and paper,

\_\_\_\_\_ **OR** Check here if you prefer to have a hard copy of the newsletter mailed to you.

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

**Ways to help the League if you wish to be an active member** (check as many as apply)

Name1 Name2

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Voter Registration at events such as the Farmers Market. Training by the County Clerk's office.

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Organize/provide refreshments at forums when we meet in person.

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Observer Corps: Watch Council, DPU, P&Z meetings etc. and write a short summary to publish in our newsletter. (All meetings are recorded, so you can watch them later.)

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Write newsletter articles on a local issue or League activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Assist in developing the Voter Guide: edit, develop questions, enter data onto League database, work with news publications to get the information printed, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Assist with Lunch with a Leader: assist in inviting leaders to give presentations; order/deliver lunches when we meet in person, help set up tables, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Website/social media: technical assistance and content development.

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Advocate for League positions: communicate with local, state, and federal leaders.

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Serve on the LWV-Los Alamos Board.

\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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League of Women Voters of Los Alamos  
P.O. Box 158  
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