

LWW LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF LOS ALAMOS

UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos
P.O. Box 158, Los Alamos, NM 87544
<https://my.lwv.org/new-mexico/los-alamos>
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Calendar

November 5	Election Day, Polls are open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
November 21	Lunch with a Leader, Dan Osborn, Unitarian Church, noon
December 9	Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon
January 6, 2025	Legislative Preview, Fuller Lodge, 7 p.m. (6:30 p.m. for refreshments)

November Lunch with a Leader: Dan Osborn

Our next Lunch with a Leader program will be on Thursday, November 21, from noon to 1 p.m. at the Unitarian Church on N. Sage Loop. Our leader will be Dan Osborn, Housing and Special Project Manager for Los Alamos County. He is a fifth-generation Colorado native and community development professional now based in Los Alamos. He previously spent over a decade in Colorado's Upper Arkansas Valley.

Osborn holds a master's degree in applied science, focusing on environmental policy, from the University of Denver, and a bachelor's degree in land use and resource management from Metropolitan State University of Denver.



Dan Osborn speaking. Source: LA Daily Post

His career includes roles in Colorado as Project Planner for Westminster and Community Development Director for Salida, along with various community development positions in Summit County. Outside of work, he enjoys traveling and staying active with his wife, their dog, and friends. He is dedicated to advancing community development and land use policy for the evolving West.

Karyl Ann Armbruster

President's Message: Electoral College Lesson

The enthusiasm of the young is invigorating! A friend who works in the Los Alamos Public Schools administration asked if I would speak with some high school students to address their questions about the Electoral College. Envisioning a small civics class, I agreed, without asking any follow-up questions aside from the date and time. Turned out to be nearly 500 juniors and seniors in Duane Smith Auditorium! My slides were projected at a very large size, and I tried to make eye contact with each section of the seats in turn. I don't know how teachers do it.

After running quickly through the history of the national League of Women of Voters, and the New Mexico League, I turned to the Los Alamos League. The kids and adults were surprised to hear that it took three years, the creation of the County, and two trips to the New Mexico Supreme Court in order to have our votes recognized as valid. The kids let out a loud cheer at this point. Meanwhile, the League women had been registering voters, working the polls, and holding candidate forums the whole time.

Then I walked through the complicated history of the Electoral College, with its origins in arrogance (Alexander Hamilton wrote that only men of discernment should be selecting the President and Vice President, while the direct vote was sufficient for all other offices) and racism (the "three-fifths compromise" in which the enslaved were counted at a 3/5 rate to increase the slaveowners' electoral votes, without extending any franchise to the enslaved themselves). I set out many examples over the past 240 years reflecting just how undemocratic and messy the Electoral College is, such that it failed repeatedly to function as was intended. I described the way the 12th Amendment adjusted it, slates and "faithless electors," and the Electoral Count Reform Act of 2022, designed to shore up weaknesses or ambiguities identified following the 2020 election.

In the last 200 years, over 700 proposals have been introduced in Congress to reform or eliminate the Electoral College, more proposals for Constitutional amendments than on any other subject. One of the earliest, accompanied by a 7-point thesis, was by Andrew Jackson in 1824; he was the first to win the popular vote for President and still lose the office. Polls over the last 40 years have shown

that most people favor the direct election of the President and Vice President, although that number varies based on party.

Based on a study from 1970 and subsequent studies, the League has endorsed direct election as essential to true representative government for decades. One way to assure that every vote is relevant is by Constitutional amendment. Without an amendment, many, including the League, are working on the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC), in which states pledge to grant their votes to the winner of the national popular vote, once the compact has 270 electoral votes. Seventeen states, including New Mexico, have already signed, along with the District of Columbia; the current total of electoral votes pledged is 209. NPVIC measures are currently pending in several more states. Until the Compact is activated, or an amendment is ratified, we can still be confident that New Mexico does elections well, as measured by the Election Performance Index, written about here before.

As for the students, they were engaged in the topic throughout, cheering various parts of the history, and those who will turn 18 by November 5 are “super excited” to vote. I got several happy fist bumps as they left the Auditorium, and found myself invigorated as well.

Felicia Orth



Felicia Orth, president of the League of Women Voters Los Alamos opens the LWV Candidate Forum October 7 at UNM-LA. Photo by Maire O'Neill/losalamosreporter.com



Christine Chandler, candidate for NM House of Representatives. Photo by Jody Benson



At the League's Candidate Forum, the candidates for County Council are Denise Derkacs, James Wernicke, moderator Felicia Orth, Ryn Herrmann, Beverly Neal-Clinton, and David Reagor. Photo by Jody Benson

Observer Corps Report – County Council – October 8

Proposed DOE Grant Program; Inclusivity Task Force

The regular session was attended by: Chair Denise Derkacs (Chair), Theresa Cull (Vice Chair), Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, Keith Lepsch, David Reagor, Randall Ryti.

Our observer report is based on discussion during the meeting and documentation provided in the full agenda package.

Proposed DOE Grant Program

Council unanimously approved the submission of a policy proposal to "Support and Advance Cities Impacted by Federal Facilities and Infrastructure through Community Benefit Programs" to the National League of Cities for consideration.

Danielle Duran, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, briefed Council on the proposal. She explained that the National League of Cities (NLC), develops policies for which the organization and its nationwide municipal members advocate." The proposed policy would support the goals of Los Alamos County," said Duran.

Resolution

The proposed resolution points out that local governments experience impacts to their infrastructure, services, and workforce as a result of the location of a large national security laboratory, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) facility or transmission infrastructure in the region.

These impacts include land use and transportation impediments associated with high-security facilities, as well as local responsibility for providing transportation infrastructure, law enforcement, and related public services for facilities that are tax-exempt in many instances.

The Department of Defense (DOD) has recognized the impacts that their facilities place on communities, for which reason it

established the Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) grant program. The DCIP has provided communities with over \$300 million in grants to alleviate the impacts of its facilities on local infrastructure, services, and workforce.

The resolution approved by Council calls on Congress and the Administration to authorize and fund a grant program similar to the DOD DCIP for communities that support DOE facilities or transmission infrastructure to help alleviate the impacts on local infrastructure, services, and workforce.

Inclusivity Task Force

Council appointed seven residents to the Inclusivity Task Force that it created on August 6: Rev. Tina DeYoe, Kazmere Duffey, Karen Edwards, Xeph Ivankovich, Jovita Mowre, Lisabeth Lueninghoener, and Kokheong McNaughton.

The Task Force will serve as an interim advisory body for the purpose of determining the need for an ongoing advisory body to study inclusivity issues in Los Alamos. It will provide a final report to Council with recommendations on ways to address inclusivity issues and promote a feeling of belonging for all community members. The terms of the Task Force will expire on November 30, 2025.

Local News Coverage

Los Alamos Daily Post, October 13, 2024.
Video: Councilor Cull Briefing
<https://ladailypost.com/council-vice-chair-cull-gives-briefing-on-oct-8-meeting/>

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report – Planning & Zoning Commission – October 9

Commissioners present: Rachel Adler (Chair), Stephanie Nakhleh (Vice Chair), David Hampton, Katherine Bruell, Karen Easton. Commissioners absent: Benjamin Hill, Ronald Nelson, Rebecca White

Chapter 16 Development Code Cleanup

By unanimous vote (5–0), the Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Commission agreed to recommend to Council that it approve the application from the Community Development Department (CDD) to amend the text of Chapter 16, Development Code. The revisions related to uncontroversial and simple corrections, such as fixing text typos, errors and redundant language, and adding omitted text.

Code clean-up process

More text amendments are planned, said Paul Andrus, CDD Director. He explained CDD's three-phase approach to zoning map updates. Tonight's text amendment application was Phase I - Errors and Omissions.

Phase II will address more substantial changes to the Code. These include correcting mislabeled open space parcels, such as those related to the Golf Course and Piñon Park in White Rock. These changes are scheduled to be presented to P&Z early in 2025.

Comprehensive Plan update

Phase III of the code cleanup will cover an update of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, including parking maximums, accessory dwelling units, and downtown district expansion. Staff will work with a consultant for community engagement and drafting of the document. Andrus expects a Request for Proposals (RFP) to be issued for planning consulting services by the end of November 2024.

Regarding the need for an update of the Comprehensive Plan at this time, Andrus noted, "When you look at our 2016 Plan, you say, 'hey, part of the vision and some of our goals are still applicable.' But boy, did a couple of things come into play that really changed the game for us."

Andrus listed the pandemic and LANL growth as two examples of game-changers. "We now have a sustainability plan," he added, "and we kind of have to address a lot of those as they relate to Council goals and values."

Following the update of the Comprehensive Plan, the final phase of code cleanup may propose more substantial changes to the Development Code, such as parking maximums, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), Downtown Los Alamos (DTLA) boundaries, and open space rezoning.

Residential zoning

On the list of items to be considered for future code changes, Commissioner Hampton requested a discussion of possible changes to single family residential zoning districts. One option would be to replace them with a family residential zoning district with looser restriction on lot sizes to accommodate townhouses and ADUs.

Development Projects under Construction

Paul Andrus updated P&Z on the status of development projects under construction.

- *The Hill Apartments* (131 35th Street). Completion of The Hill has been slowed by a lack of workers. The first building will not be ready for occupancy for a few months.
- *Arkansas Place*. Arkansas Place has two residential units on the market. No timeline is available for completion of additional units.
- *Hilltop Site*. Andrus reported that the development group for the Hilltop Site is moving forward, working on the site plan and construction documents. "They're very interested in the Metropolitan Redevelopment Area potential that might help

them," said Andrus. It "might provide some partnership opportunities with the County."

- *Mari-Mac*. Andrus said he did not have any progress to report on the Mari-Mac site.
- *20th Street Mixed Use Development*. The County is in the early stages of negotiating with a developer on an agreement to enable the County to sell that property to be developed.
- *Cañada Bonita Apartments* (2100 and 2202 Canyon Rd.). Due to rising costs of labor and materials, the developer is pursuing HUD financing, which offers lower interest rates than other sources of financing.
- *Ponderosa Estates Phase 3* subdivision (285 Maple Dr.). Andrus said that CDD has not had much response from the developers of Ponderosa.

Andrus noted that the market is limiting progress on these projects. "I saw a survey of home builders that asked 'What are your biggest obstacles to actually build housing?' And the top is interest rates, it's supply chains, it's workforce. And I just want to say one of the lowest ones is permitting."

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report – County Council – October 22

Road and Traffic Safety; Environmental Sustainability

The work session was attended by Chair Denise Derkacs (Chair), Theresa Cull (Vice Chair), Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, Keith Lepsch, David Reagor, Randall Ryt

Our observer report is based on discussion during the meeting and documentation provided in the full agenda package.

Road and Traffic Safety

Background

Chief of Police Dino Sgambellone and Public Works Director Juan Rael described current and potential roadway safety measures and asked Council where it would like staff to focus.

Chief Sgambellone characterized the current strategy for traffic safety as a multi-pronged approach including enforcement, educational outreach, and preventative measures.

- Enforcement activities include issuing traffic citations and warnings, conducting DUI checkpoints, and organizing traffic safety operations.
- Educational outreach efforts encompass press releases, website development, annual report data dissemination, and public discussions or presentations.
- Preventative engagement involves programmatic initiatives, fostering community partnerships, collaborating with County departments, and utilizing CodeRed alerts to keep the public informed and engaged.

Safety statistics

However, safety statistics and public outcry are evidence that these measures have been inadequate in reducing the incidence of speeding, aggressive or careless driving, and accidents. Chief Sgambellone presented data showing that, as of September, his department has seen 1813 traffic violations, including 779 speeding violations and 483 accidents. In the past 8 years, the County has had six fatal accidents.

What more can be done?

Backed by extensive research, Chief Sgambellone and Juan Rael identified the most promising potential enhancements to the

County's traffic safety strategies and the problems associated with their implementation.

Topping the list of promising strategies, Automated Speed Enforcement is designed to reduce serious accidents and fatalities through a reduction in overall speed. This measure consists of a traffic enforcement camera mounted beside or over a road or in a police vehicle to detect motoring offenses and record license plates. Chief Sgambellone emphasized the positive outcomes of this strategy, citing an 80% reduction in speeding violations in Albuquerque.

This solution also is a much safer and more effective speed management strategy for traffic officers. Chief Sgambellone said, "We can't be everywhere, and then some of the places we need to be, like the S curve on the truck route, are very dangerous for my officers to be..."

Chief Sgambellone also raised the idea of a local County ordinance banning the use of handheld phones while driving. County Attorney Leaphart noted that New Mexico has a texting ban but not a handheld ban. However, the effectiveness of such a ban could be problematic. "How would you enforce it?" asked Chief Sgambellone. Many times, it is hard to know the 'why' of an accident, he added.

The best argument for adopting an ordinance banning cellphone use while driving is the message that it would send to get people to change their behavior. Chief Sgambellone noted that the vast majority of people in the County regularly conform to the law. "When the seatbelt issue came along (in the 80s), there was a lot of push-back," he said, "and now most people regularly wear seat belts and don't even think about it."

Reduced speed limits are another promising strategy to reduce fatalities and damaging accidents. Even the slightest reduction in speed has a positive impact on outcome. The death risk is about 4-5 times higher in collisions between a car and a pedestrian at 30 mph compared to the same type of collisions at 20 mph.

A patchwork of jurisdictions and need for coordination

Implementing new solutions is complicated by the patchwork of jurisdictional boundaries in the County, necessitating a multi-jurisdictional approach with partnering among federal, state, and neighboring municipalities and counties. Key stakeholders include the NM Department of Transportation (NMDOT) and DOE-owned roads as well as roads under the purview of San Ildefonso Pueblo, Santa Fe County, and Los Alamos County (see map).

Rael pointed out the complications. "How do we study a road that's not ours? And what would we do with that data?" he said. "I'm just unsure of, once we evaluate it, what's the next step, if we, as the County, can't implement it."

Furthermore, talking with the right people in other organizations is not always easy. "We are engaging with DOT," said Rael. "However, Chief Sgambellone and I both feel we're not engaging with our counterparts at LANL and DOE. Rael requested that Council make a point of raising this issue with LANL and DOE.

Similarly, in terms of a speed camera project, there are limitations as to where the County can put them. "DOE land is a possibility if we come to an agreement with them," said Rael, "but we don't have civil authority in some areas, such as on the road up the Hill, even under an MOU with the Sheriff of Santa Fe County."

Council discussion

The Council discussed the potential traffic safety measures, focusing on automated speed enforcement and an ordinance banning handheld phone use while driving. The Council debated the need for speed limit reductions, particularly on high-risk roads like Diamond Drive. They also emphasized the importance of public education and community engagement to reduce accidents caused by distracted driving and vehicle collisions with wildlife.

Wildlife measures

Councilor Hand noted that the list of recommended next steps did not address wildlife even though the presentation recognized wildlife collisions as a problem. Chief Sgambellone had reported that 62 vehicle/wildlife collisions occurred in 2023, and 48 such collisions have occurred through September 2024, particularly on Diamond Drive (see map).

The Chief cited a report about best practices to reduce animal-vehicle collisions, but the solutions focused on fencing and barricades. He said, "Nothing really jumped out at me in that report that was like the magic solution you heard from Game and Fish in terms of the potential to reduce things like this with some sort of feeding [ban]. You know, not inviting the animals into populated areas."

County Manager Laurent pointed out that "we're bringing wildlife back before the end of the year with the Department of Game and Fish." She said the topic wasn't addressed in the presentation because there will be a discussion on that item with some additional experts in the room."

Outreach measures

Councilor Havemann emphasized the need for measures that change behavior and the potential for peer pressure and cultural change to address distracted driving. "I would like to explore the possibility of reporting and informing the public on a more timely basis about the causes of collisions and accidents of any kind. ... I think that it's important to have a citizenry that's informed."

Reducing traffic

Councilor Havemann also voiced the ongoing desire to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads. "There's a whole lot we can do with the laboratory and other major employers in our community to do that, related to parking." She suggested a transportation savings account.

Council unanimously passed a motion to support the actions recommended by the Chief of Police:

- Return to Council with ordinances for an Automated Speed Enforcement Program and prohibition on using handheld phones while driving.
- Implement feasibility studies for road design improvements related to 502, such as rumble strips on NM 502 (LAC/NMDOT)
- Review NM 502 speed limits (LAC/NMDOT) in relation to accident data.
- Engage and coordinate with residents and commuters, LANL, NMDOT, San Ildefonso Pueblo, and Santa Fe County on road and traffic safety concerns.
- Develop FY26 Budget Hearings proposals related to Road and Traffic Safety projects and programs.

Environmental Sustainability Goal-- Status update

Linda Matteson, Deputy County Manager, reviewed highlights on activities performed by the County this year to address Council's strategic goal of Environmental Stewardship. Her presentation covered the goal's five priorities: natural resource protection, greenhouse gas reduction, carbon-neutral energy supply, water conservation, and waste management.

Natural Resource Protection

Actions taken to protect the wildlife and wildland interface, safeguard water, and mitigate tree loss in the community.

- Designation of Los Alamos as a Bee City USA Affiliate and the opening of the pollinator garden;
- Implementation of a robust and engaging wildlife education campaign (County website, County Line newsletter and utility bill inserts);
- Implementation of bear resistant trash roll carts to reduce human-bear interactions;
- Progress on updating the Open Space and Trails Management Plan;
- Undertaking an inventory of tree species, health and tree canopies in County parks and recreation facilities;

- Planting trees on the golf course in accordance with the County's Tree Preservation and Mitigation Procedure; and
- Reduction in the use of carbon fuels, testing battery-powered park maintenance equipment, and converting the golf cart fleet to battery powered.

Greenhouse Gas Reduction

Actions taken to establish targets for achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and integrate sustainability and resiliency practices into County policies and operations.

- Scheduled presentation of the final Climate Action Plan (CAP) to Council in November 2024.
- Planned expansion of the EV charging network by installing 14 new Level 2 chargers, initially focused on county property.
- Developing a Fleet Conversion Plan and Community-Wide EV Charging Plan.

Carbon-Neutral Energy Supply

Actions taken towards achieving carbon neutrality in electrical supply by 2040 through diversified carbon-free electric sourcing, and phasing out the natural gas supply by 2070.

- Contracted for 170 MW of solar power and 80 MW of battery storage at Foxtail Flats to grow the County's renewable energy portfolio. Phase I, which includes 50% of the system, will come online March 2026.

Water Conservation

Actions taken to reduce potable water use and increase non-potable water use and water harvesting for irrigation where suitable.

- Partnered with PEEC in schools to educate on water conservation and watersheds, including a snowshoeing trip for 6th graders and the Water Festival for 4th graders.
- Partnered with Master Gardeners to present the Sustainable Landscape Design series.

- Hosted a Water Taste Test to promote the value of our water. Reached nearly 1000 people.
- Continued to implement the Long-Range Water Supply Plan, the Water and Energy Conservation Plan, and educational programs to promote sustainable water use.
- Improved the quality of treated effluent to a class 1A standard, the highest possible. This achievement was due to the installation of an upgraded filtration system on the Los Alamos Wastewater Treatment Plant, and completion of the White Rock Water Resource Recovery Facility, which replaces the former White Rock Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- Construction of a new reclaimed water storage tank (Bayo Booster Station Tank project).

Waste Management

Actions to manage waste responsibly by diversion of solid waste from landfills through recycling, re-use, composting, and waste reduction programs and zero-waste education campaigns; and pursue efficient long-term solutions for disposal of solid waste.

- Seeking DOE approval to amend the lease to allow aerated static food composting at the Los Alamos County Eco Station;
- Developed a Zero Waste Strategy as part of the Climate Action Plan;
- Exploring regional solid waste disposal options including conducting a regional landfill study and exploring Waste to Energy options.

Performance Dashboard

Using her presentation highlights as examples, Matteson introduced the County's new Performance Dashboard for the Environmental Stewardship strategic goal. The dashboard allows the public to view the County's action plans and advancements toward achieving Council's goals and priorities, such as those described in her presentation.

According to a County Press Release, "To explore the dashboard, visitors can go to <https://www.losalamosnm.us/Home> and select "Performance Metrics Dashboard" under the "What's Happening" tab. Metrics are updated regularly by County staff, and reflected immediately on the dashboard. Los Alamos County encourages community members interested in understanding how the County is working to meet the Council's strategic goals to visit the dashboard."

Council discussion

Councilor Ryti asked about evaluating the effectiveness of the wildlife education campaign messaging. He also suggested that the County repeat key messages about feeding wildlife more frequently. The County's messages "tend to focus on more interesting information about wildlife," he said, "but they don't focus on, maybe you shouldn't feed wildlife. Just keep telling people that over and over again."

Councilor Ryti also raised a concern about the lack of action plans to address the environmental impacts of County projects.

Local News Coverage

Los Alamos Daily Post, October 24, 2024.

Video: Councilor Hand Briefing
<https://ladailypost.com/video-councilor-melanee-hand-discusses-tuesdays-work-session/>

Stephanie Nakhleh, BoomGov, October 19, 2024. BoomGov agenda preview, "Council agenda 10-22-24."

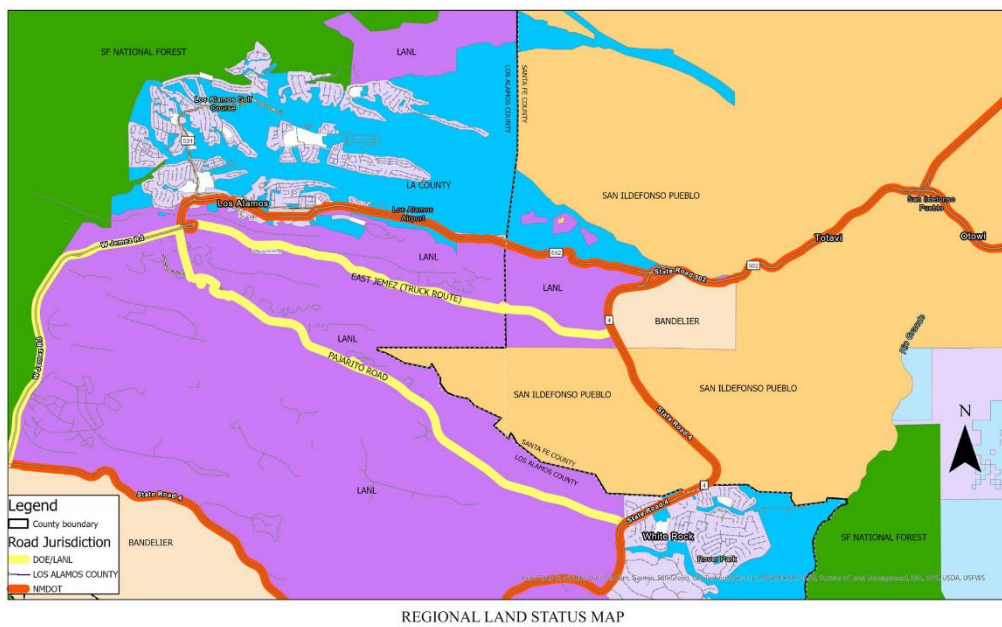
<https://www.boomtownlosalamos.org/p/boomgov-council-agenda-10-22-24>

County Press Release, Los Alamos Daily Post, October 16, 2024. "County Launches Performance Metrics Dashboard Online."

<https://ladailypost.com/county-launches-performance-metrics-dashboard-online/>

Performance Metrics Dashboard website
<https://www.losalamosnm.us/Home/Tabs/Whats-Happening/Performance-Metrics-Dashboard>

Patchwork of jurisdictional boundaries for land ownership and roads.

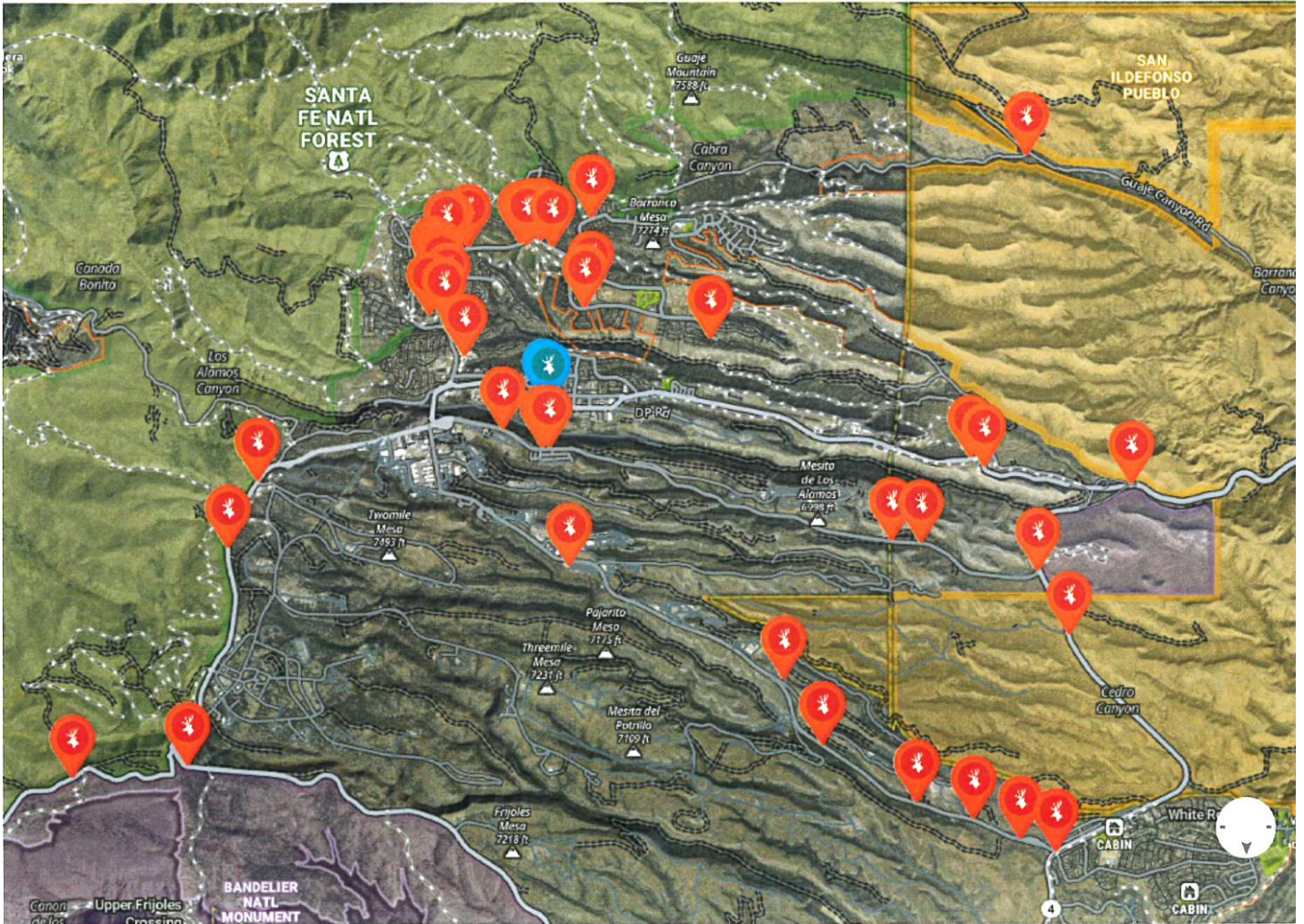


Source: Los Alamos County Police Department.

Color key for land: Los Alamos County (blue), Santa Fe National Forest (green), San Ildefonso Pueblo (in Santa Fe County) (light tan), LANL (purple), Bandelier National Monument (light pink). Color key for major roads: DOE/LANL (Pajarito Road, Truck Route/East Jemez Rd, West Jemez Rd) (pale yellow lines); NM DOT (SR-4, SR-502) (dark orange lines), Los Alamos County roads (thin light gray lines).

Vehicular collisions with wildlife in Los Alamos Townsite, January-September 2024

The highest proportion of accidents occur on Diamond Drive (upper middle of map).



Source: Los Alamos County Police Department.

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report – County Council – October 29

National Community Survey; Re-zoning the Women's Dorm Building Property

The regular session was attended by: Denise Derkacs (Chair), Theresa Cull (Vice Chair), Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, Keith Lepsch, David Reagor, Randall Ryti.

Our observer report is based on discussion during the meeting and documentation provided in the full agenda package.

National Community Survey

The Los Alamos County National Community Survey results for 2024 were presented by Brandon Barnett from Polco. Introducing Barnett, Public Information Officer, Julie Williams-Hill said, "This marks the third time that we've partnered with Polco to conduct this survey, which gauges our citizens' perceptions on the community's livability. Previous surveys were in 2020 and 2022."

The survey, conducted in August 2024, had a 12% response rate, with 419 completed surveys. A 12% survey response rate is considered good, said Barnett, and is within the average that they have been seeing. However, the total number of responses is more important. "The industry standard is to get 350 to 400 responses," he said. "So, to be over 400, we are actually above the industry standard."

Highlights of survey results

Safety, natural environment, and mobility were rated higher than the national benchmarks, as well as parks and recreational opportunities and items related to education, arts and culture:

- About 90% of respondents reported feeling very or somewhat safe from property and violent crime.

- About 90% praised the air quality, cleanliness, and yard waste pickup services in the county.
- Approximately 80% expressed satisfaction with the preservation of natural areas and the County's open space. "It's obvious that residents value the county's natural environment," said Barnett.
- The County's parks and recreational opportunities also scored highly. About 90% of residents applauded the availability of paths and walking trails. Recreational opportunities and County parks received high marks from roughly 80% of the respondents. Recreation centers or facilities were valued by 71% of residents, an increase from 64% in 2022.
- In terms of mobility, the ease of traveling by car and public parking was commended by 80%. About 70% praised the ease of walking.
- Ease of travel by bicycles significantly increased from 2022.
- Roughly 40% indicated they used public transportation instead of driving, displaying a statistically significant upward trend from the previous iteration.

Lowlights of survey results

The lowest performing areas included the quality of business and service establishments, the vibrancy of the downtown commercial area, and the cost of living. Several items scored below national benchmarks:

- Only 40% gave a positive rating to the overall quality of business and service establishments, ranking below other similar communities.
- About 10% rated the variety of business and service establishments and shopping opportunities positively.
- The vibrancy of downtown commercial areas and economic development were rated favorably by only about 20%.
- About 40% gave a positive rating to the availability of affordable quality food and preventative health services.

- Affordable quality health care was rated positively by only 35% of residents, and only 20% rated the availability of affordable quality mental health care positively.
- The availability of affordable quality housing received positive ratings from just 10% of community members.

Final observations

Councilor Havemann asked, "Do you have any kind of expert perspective, takeaways, advice, when you look at these results relative to input you give your other clients?"

Barnett highlighted the positive takeaways from the survey results. "There are some good things in here," he said. "What we've been seeing nationally has been significant declines in not just the economy and affordability itself, ... but also in community design and specifically in mobility as well. ... And so, to really only have had two items that statistically significantly decreased, is a strong takeaway.

Barnett also emphasized the importance of benchmarking against previous surveys and identifying areas of improvement. In the 2024 survey, many items statistically increased compared to the county's previous survey results. Such a result is also counter to national trends, said Barnett. "Have you been able to really move the needle in some of these areas, to see a positive reflection in resident sentiment? And you have. And that's absolutely something that you should take as a success and take as a positive when coming out of these results."

Summarizing the take-home message, Chair Derkacs noted, "What I could see is overall improvements from the last survey, which is encouraging, but there are clearly still areas for improvement that we need to focus on, and that we will address in our strategic planning session."

Re-zoning the Property Known as the Women's Dorm Building

Council discussed an application from the County to rezone the property commonly known as the Women's Dorm Building (at 1725 17th Street) from single-family residential to

institutional. This rezoning case had previously been reviewed by the Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Commission at its meeting on August 28, 2024. However, the Commission was unable to reach a decision, resulting in the case being forwarded to the Council for review.

Background for rezoning application

The Community Development Department (CDD) staff report provides background for the rezoning application. The lot under consideration is occupied by the Women's Army Corps (WAC) building, commonly known as the Women's Dorm Building, which was constructed in 1943, during the Manhattan Project Era. In 2019, the County Council voted to purchase the property from its owner, the Christian Science Society.

In 2022, the Council approved a conceptual design to renovate the building into a visitor center, with museum and exhibits, and associated office space and caretaker's unit for the National Park Service. Unfortunately, according to the County Development Code, those uses are not allowed in the Single-Family Residential Zone District. As a result, the County is asking to rezone the Property to Institutional Zone District so that the project can proceed.

Arguments for and against rezoning

The County's application argued that rezoning the property to Institutional met a lot of Council's strategic goals. The proposed change would support efforts to market and brand Los Alamos as a scenic destination featuring recreation, science, and history, attract new tourism-related business, and revitalize areas of Los Alamos and White Rock to maximize the use of County-owned land.

The Commission's key concerns about the rezoning were around the limitations of the Institutional zoning in accommodating housing and the desire for a more flexible zoning classification that could better meet the county's strategic goals for increasing housing.

The Commission voted 3–2 in favor of recommending the rezoning to the County Council. However, under the County Code,

approval requires at least four affirmative votes from the members present. Consequently, the application was forwarded to the Council without any recommendation.

Arguments for and against remanding

In introducing the motion to remand the case, Councilor Ryti elaborated on his reasons, including the potential appointment of a new P&Z commissioner at the Council's next meeting. He argued that remanding the matter back to the Commission would clarify the authority on minor zoning changes and avoid potential delays. "I think there's a lot of benefits to making sure we use our Commission," he said. "That's the body that has been used to having these quasi-judicial hearings, and they have a process to take care of it."

Councilor Havemann disagreed, arguing that the Council should proceed to rule on the rezoning application rather than sending it back to the Commission, primarily because she felt it would delay moving forward with the project. "I believe that developing this as a Manhattan Project visitor center and a place for people to gather and learn about our history is a positive, and preserving this building is a positive," she said. "I feel like we're just kicking the can down the road when a prior Council in 2022 already pretty much approved proceeding with this."

Deputy County Manager Linda Matteson noted that "the building is not registered yet with the historic registry, but we are working that process. ... But right now, the project is kind of on hold. We're in a holding pattern because we need to get the rezone accomplished and we need to get the site plan approved."

Council decision

Chair Derkacs outlined Council's options, which were to approve, deny, or remand the application back to the P&Z Commission. On a 6-to-1 vote (Councilor Havemann in opposition), Council decided to remand the application back to the P&Z for reconsideration.

October Lunch with a Leader: Stephanie Nakhleh

Stephanie Nakhleh and photographer Minesh Bakrania co-founded *Boomtown* eleven months ago as an independent publication reporting in depth on important issues in Los Alamos. During the Lunch with a Leader program, Nakhleh, who grew up in Los Alamos, reviewed local news going back thirty years. She reminisced about her experiences as a cub reporter for the *Los Alamos Monitor* in the mid-nineties.

At that time the *Monitor* had a staff of thirty and covered businesses, schools, the police and the Lab as well as County government. The paper was able to cover details of a fatal crash, send staff to attend daily police briefings, and interview people from all walks of life, even homeless families.

The *Monitor* journalists worked as a team with the public in mind, Nakhleh said. They were stewards of accountability and transparency. The reporting was all original; there were no articles from other sources. Because the public could be shown what happened, they could push for needed reforms. However, the *Monitor* ceased publication in 2020. Nakhleh noted that since 2005, 2900 newspapers have vanished and attributed the decline to the Internet.

Today there are three news outlets here (the *Los Alamos Daily Post*, the *Los Alamos Reporter*, and *Boomtown*). Each has its own style, but they are all stretched super thin. Nakhleh named her publication “*Boomtown*” because of the County’s recent rapid growth, which is a shock to many aspects of the County. She wants to write stories about traffic, housing, local government, and the Lab, but siloing and bureaucracy make it difficult.

Local news is not dead, but in contrast to thirty years ago, both the local government and the Lab now withhold the details of their actions and Nakhleh no longer has easy access to the Lab Director or County staff, making it difficult to determine the truth. She asked, “Without the truth, without the facts, how can we push for change?” More information is needed about significant events in town. We all benefit from the revelations of investigative journalism. In the absence of facts, rumors arise; rumor-mongering is harder on families than facts. Furthermore, there is an explosion of litigation due to the absence of information.

Nakhleh said we need a real analysis of Council decisions. A good article would explain both the advantages and disadvantages of a policy. Journalism can help us see things as they are so that we can make informed decisions. The community needs to support local journalism. Both free and paid subscriptions to *Boomtown* are available.



Stephanie Nakhleh Source: <https://www.boomtownlosalamos.org/>

Barbara Calef

Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies

Tickler Report

Tentative Council Agenda Items as of October 29, 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 October 29, 2024 session. All of the items are subject to change.

- Site Options to Replace Fire Station 4
 - 11/12/24 meeting. Possible action to select a site
- Final Climate Action Plan
 - 11/12/24 meeting. Possible action to approve plan.
- Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA)
 - 11/12/24 meeting. Presentation by Community Services Department Director. No action requested.
- Los Alamos County Health Council
 - 11/12/24 meeting. Briefing by Chair of Los Alamos County Health Council.
- 2025 Strategic Priorities Discussion
 - 11/14/24 meeting. Presentation. No action requested.
- Community Broadband Network Services
 - 11/19/24 meeting. Contract for Design and Construction of Community Broadband Network Services. Action requested.

eComment Tool for Council meetings:

You can use the County's eComment tool to submit public comments once the agenda is published, typically the Friday before the meeting. Comments may be submitted until noon on the day of the Council meeting. Copies will be provided to each councilor for the meeting.

Submit comments at the Granicus website: <https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>. Use the search filters to find the meeting and select "eComment" in the far-right column. Agenda items open for public comment will be marked with a "Comment" tag.

Los Alamos County public release: *Los Alamos Daily Post*, August 24, 2024. "County Launches eComment Tool for Council Meetings", <https://ladailypost.com/county-launches-ecomment-tool-for-council-meetings/>

County BCC Vacancies as of October 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 listed below as of October 31, 2024.

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

- Art in Public Places Board 0
 - 2 terms ending March 24, 2025
- Board of Public Utilities 0
 - No terms ending soon
- County Health Council 4
 - 5 terms ending Jan 6, 2025
- Environmental Sustainability Board 0
 - No terms ending soon
- Historic Preservation Advisory Board 0
 - No terms ending soon
- Library Board 0
 - No terms ending soon
- Lodgers' Tax Advisory Board 3
 - 1 term ending Dec 1, 2024
- Parks and Recreation Board 0
 - 3 terms ending Nov 30, 2024
- Personnel Board 0
 - 1 term ending March 31, 2025
- Planning and Zoning Commission 1
 - 3 terms ending March 31, 2025
- Transportation Board 1
 - 3 terms ending Feb 28, 2025

Totals: 9 vacancies, 16 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" at:

<https://www.losalamosnm.us/Government/Leadership/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: _____

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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