

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

December 9	Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon
January 6, 2025	Legislative Preview, Fuller Lodge, 7 p.m. (6:30 p.m. for refreshments)
January 16, 2025	Lunch with a Leader, Unitarian Church, noon

No December Lunch with a Leader

Because of the holidays, there will be no Lunch with a Leader meeting in December. We will have a speaker on January 16, 2025.

Karyl Ann Armbruster

President's Message: Our Work Continues

Even the lightest touch on the pulse of current public discourse reveals strong contention, anger, and fear. The League's work and goals feel more important than ever: to register those who are eligible to vote, to educate them through voter guides and candidate forums, to help assure ease of voting and the integrity of the electoral process, to advocate for sensible decisions on matters of public policy, to combat disinformation, and to fight gerrymandering and maintain fair districting.

Over the next few months we will be reflecting on whether there are additional opportunities in this landscape for the League to make a constructive difference. We are fortunate to have the robust support of this community: in volunteers, monetary gifts, forum attendees, and readers of the voter guides. That support has endured for more than 75 years.

Reach out to a Board member with any suggestions to further our mission; we can continue to build on this foundation.

Felicia Orth

Change Is Coming!

Until now, membership dues for the League have been paid to the local League and once a year our treasurer has sent a check for PMP (per member payment) to the state League (LWVNM), and a check to the national League (LWVUS). We have paid \$32 per member to LWVUS and \$13 per member to LWVNM. We paid half that amount for each second household member.

LWVUS has decided to change the process for funding the League at all levels. They are switching to a new member portal, ChapterSpot, for all Leagues across the country.

The first week in February you will receive an email to log in to the portal, but you will not be asked to pay dues until 12 months after your previous renewal in 2024. You will be given the option to sign up to auto-renew annually. Once you have access to the portal, you will be able to update your own information, including contact information.

When it comes time to renew, you will receive an email reminder. Dues will no longer be a fixed rate but will be pay-what-you-can. The recommended dues amount for all members across the country will be \$75, but members can pay any amount from \$20 up. There will no longer be household memberships. If you currently have a household membership, each person will have to log on to the portal.

Under the new system, a percentage of the payment on the ChapterSpot portal will automatically go to the state (47%), national (33%), and local Leagues (20%). This means that, if you would like to make a donation to LWVLA, it will need to be a separate action, sending a check to LWVLA or going online to:

<https://my.lwv.org/new-mexico/los-alamos/contribution-form>.

There will still be the option to renew by check for members who don't use the internet, but members who are able to access the portal and renew that way are encouraged to do so. The League hopes these changes will make managing your membership easier. It should make our treasurer's job easier. LWVUS expects the change to lead to an increase in membership around the country, enhancing our ability to empower voters and defend democracy.

If you have any questions, please contact me by email or phone.

Barbara Calef

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Observer Corps Report – County Council – November 12

Development Code Cleanup; Fire Station Replacement; Climate Action Plan

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.

Chapter 16 Development Code Cleanup

Voting 6–1, with Councilor Reagor in dissent, Council approved the application from the Community Development Department (CDD) to amend the Development Code regarding the process for Minor Zone Map Amendments. The amendment clarifies that the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) is the final decision-making body for such cases. The intent of the amendment is to streamline the rezoning process by eliminating redundant hearings and ensuring clear decision-making roles.

The P&Z held a public hearing on the amendment at its meeting on September 25, 2024, and submitted a recommendation for approval to Council. [See Observer report for P&Z meeting on September 25 in the October LWVLA Update.]

Distinction between Minor and Major Zone Map Amendments

As defined in the Development Code, the distinction between Minor and Major Zone Map Amendments hinges on ownership of the land parcel or lot.

If a parcel or lot is predominantly owned by a single person or entity, the application is considered a Minor Zone Map Amendment. Minor amendments are quasi-judicial proceedings that require a P&Z hearing,

consistent with state law, said County Attorney Alvin Leaphart. The Commission collects evidence, hears testimony, and makes findings of fact, conclusions of law, and makes the final decision. Council serves as an appellate body, but does not collect new evidence or hold another full public hearing.

Parcels or lots not predominantly owned by a single person or entity are considered Major Zone Map Amendments. These are legislative because the decisions can affect more than one parcel in a zone, said Leaphart. The Council is the final decision-making body in a legislative capacity. The process is not quasi-judicial, so the Council can consider broader policy implications. The Council holds public hearings, collects evidence, and makes the final legislative decision.

County staff emphasized that, from their perspective, the amendment merely clarified what was intended when Chapter 16 was updated. Staff held that this was not a new change to give P&Z additional authorities but rather was only meant to clarify what its authority was intended to be.

Applications to rezone public land

Concerns were raised about the potential impact on public land, including open space, given that the P&Z is the final decision-maker for applications to rezone County-owned property.

Although otherwise in support of the amendment, resident Alan Markus requested Council to consider clarifying that the minor zone amendment was not applicable to public-owned property. Resident James Wernicke expounded on this point of view. "Public land is a public good, and we would like to have our elected officials [make the final decision], the ones that are accountable for making decisions in the public interest," he said.

County staff contended that these concerns were unwarranted because Council would always have a say in the case. Open space parcels proposed to be rezoned will be presented to Council, likely through a work session, to get the Council's input and direction on how to proceed.

Countering these comments, County Manager Anne Laurent noted that, "I couldn't come up with a scenario where it would end up in front of the Planning Commission before some topic or some project or some initiative wasn't funded and blessed by Council to move forward. ... If there was an issue at the P&Z where there was some thought that they didn't meet the criteria, apply the criteria set out by Council in the code, then there would be an opportunity to appeal that to Council. So, Council would still, if there was a problem, be able to hear it under appeal."

Councilor Ryti agreed with Laurent's assessment. "Any project would have to be approved by Council, and I don't think that staff are going to be presenting rezoning requests without the County Manager, and I don't think the County Manager will direct zone map requests without some discussion at Council and in public."

Who can testify or appeal a case rezoning open space?

Councilor Reagor was concerned that only people "with standing" are permitted to testify or appeal a decision.

Laurent replied that, in order to have standing, the party needs to make the case as to how they will be affected by the decision. Expanding on her comment, Leaphart said that "the question of standing to appeal is not a bright line. ... To say that those within 300 feet do have standing, that's a bright line. But where standing extends beyond that is not as clear. ... That's the nature of a quasi-judicial proceeding; you have to have a dog in the fight to be part of the case. You can't go down to the courthouse when there's a case going on and just drop in and say, 'I have something to say about this case you're litigating here.' " He pointed out, however, that the definition of standing is quite expansive under New Mexico law. "So, I don't think people are going to be deprived of the opportunity to be heard," Leaphart concluded.

Fire Station 4 Replacement

The Council discussed the replacement of Fire Station 4 on Diamond Drive, emphasizing community input and the need for a site that meets national standards and firefighter needs. The project aims to improve firefighter health and station efficiency, addressing structural issues and maintenance costs of the current station.

Three sites were evaluated, with Site A (the existing location) being the community's top choice, supported by 93% of survey respondents and all who attended one of the community meetings. The top five factors identified by the community were quick response times, preserving open space and trails, building sustainably, potential traffic impacts, and neighborhood noise levels. Site A was also preferred for minimal environmental impact and existing utility access infrastructure.

The Council unanimously approved Site A for the new fire station.

With Council's approval of the site option, the Project Team can now proceed to the pre-design and design phases of the project.

Public Hearing on Climate Action Plan

The County Council held a public hearing on the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and its target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. The Council approved the adoption of the plan by a vote of 5–2, with Councilors Hand and Reagor opposed. The plan includes goals to phase out natural gas for residents and businesses by 2070, but accelerated to 2050 for County facilities.

Public input reflected broad support, tempered by concerns about costs, feasibility, and the potential impact on the community. Responding to public opposition, the updated CAP removed mandates for community-level actions and included more details on emissions data and cost evaluation.

The CAP is available on the County Sustainability webpage at <https://lacnm.com/Sustainability>. It will be reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary.

Origin of the CAP

Sustainability Manager Angelica Gurule reminded the Council of the CAP's origin, emphasizing the pivotal role of community members. "Let us remember why we began this journey," she said. "It started with the citizen petition followed by a Council initiative, each aimed at making real progress toward climate action based on the top three recommendations from the Los Alamos Resiliency, Energy, and Sustainability (LARES) Task Force. Our first step was to quantify our emissions; ensure a data-driven approach to effectively reducing greenhouse gas emissions; establishing a net zero greenhouse gas emission goal for Los Alamos County, community, and government; and creating and adopting a strategic climate action plan for the county. ... I'm proud to say the final CAP delivers on all these items requested."

Overview of the CAP

Gurule's presentation focused on the public awareness campaign for the CAP and comments received from the community, followed by an overview of the final plan. The plan aims to reduce the County's carbon footprint and develop adaptation and resilience strategies to offset the effects of climate change. It includes a baseline policy assessment, greenhouse gas inventories, strategy and action development and refinement.

Based on this groundwork, the CAP provides a roadmap that enables the County to implement effective, targeted policies and programs to reduce emissions and strengthen community resilience. Key strategies include improving energy efficiency, electrification, and public transportation. The plan sets ambitious targets: 30% reduction by 2030, 80% by 2040, and full carbon neutrality by 2050.

"The CAP demonstrates our commitment to environmental stewardship and our willingness to join the global effort to address climate change," said Gurule. "Though Los Alamos may be small, we hold a leadership role within our state and can inspire other communities to follow suit."

Public input on the CAP

Gurule explained that the Plan highlights key initiatives across six focus areas (see the graphic on p. 7). Within each area, the plan lists specific actions, such as improving energy efficiency in new buildings, moving away from natural gas to full electrification, and increasing bike routes and pedestrian-friendly streets.

Throughout the process, the CAP project team aggressively sought community engagement to shape the plan's priorities and actionable items. Altogether, over 500 public comments were received, said Gurule, highlighting support for reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainability, while tempered by concerns about the practicality and financial implications of the proposed measures.

"[Public] sentiments on the document range from enthusiastic support to cautious approval and outright opposition, reflecting a broad spectrum of perspectives on how to best tackle climate change at our local level," said Gurule.

Gurule gave an overview on the public feedback received on each focus area, including building and energy, transportation and land use, materials and consumption, and natural resources.

- **Buildings and Energy.** Support for renewable energy, energy efficiency in new buildings, and moving away from natural gas to electrification of homes and buildings. Concerns about the cost of electrification and switching from natural gas to electric systems, skilled contractor availability, and strain on the electric grid.
- **Transportation and Land Use.** Support for improving bicycle infrastructure, enhancing public transportation and electrifying the bus fleet. Concerns about the difficulty of reducing transportation emissions from commuting into the County for work, safe bicycle infrastructure, and the cost of EV charging stations.
- **Materials and Consumption.** Support for expanding recycling and composting programs, and Zero Waste initiatives such as reducing single-use plastics and food

waste, and implementing community education. Concerns about the cost for residents associated with zero waste policies, and the relevance of including support for farmers' markets in the climate action plan.

- Natural Systems and Water Resources. Support for the importance of protecting forests and open spaces, and for water conservation efforts, including greywater systems and rain harvesting. Concerns about the County's greywater policy and the need for it to be more comprehensive. Watering the golf course was seen as inconsistent with climate goals.
- Cross-Cutting Strategies (Education, Equity and Policy Coordination). Support for expanding climate education efforts, particularly in schools and the community, and the need for equitable implementation of climate initiatives. The state's anti-donation clause was cited as a barrier to providing financial incentives for residents to make energy-efficient upgrades. People also pointed out the policy inconsistency between CAP initiatives and other county policies such as the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) goal to phase out natural gas by 2070.

Key changes in the updated CAP

Gurule addressed a few of the changes made to the plan in response to public feedback:

- Responding to strong public opposition to mandates, the revised CAP maintained mandates only for County operations, but removed those that applied to the community.
- Commenters expressed the need for more information on cost analysis. Although a more detailed cost analysis is beyond the scope of the current plan, Gurule said that, as projects are pursued, their Return on Investment (ROI) will be evaluated.
- In response to public requests, calculation data for Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions will be included as part of the appendices in

the final report or be made available on the Sustainability website.

Council discussion

Council's responses to the plan echoed those of the community, ranging from strong support to outright opposition. Most Councilors supported the plan's goals. Some expressed concerns about its practicality, especially the phase-out of natural gas and its financial implications for residents.

Councilor Cull emphasized the importance of the CAP as a guiding document for County decisions. "I do think it's easy to get hung up on dates and some of the words," she said. "There are things that still need to be determined, but we have some idea of what we need to do to move forward. And, in my opinion, it is very important to move forward, and this plan will help guide us forward to basically a better, safer, and potentially more cost-effective community in the long run."

Councilor Hand felt the plan needed more work before approval. "I support the overall intent of the plan, but many details still seem lofty or unreasonable to implement, in my opinion," she said. "As a County Councilor, I see difficulties to fully support implementation of this plan because the decisions that come before me on a daily basis can be in conflict with the plan as it currently stands."

Councilor Havemann emphasized the collective responsibility to address climate change as the price of being part of a community. She added, "I think that not only can we reduce our carbon footprint, which then helps make a positive impact on our seat at the global table, but it can also improve quality of life and indoor air quality and our environment." Chair Derkacs concurred, saying, "I also recognize our role as citizens of the world and our responsibility to do our part, however so small."

Councilor Reagor opposed the CAP due to concerns over the natural gas phase-out and the financial impact on low- and middle-income residents. He suggested that those who want to reduce emissions should do so as individuals, such as by purchasing solar panels




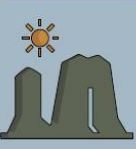


or electric vehicles, rather than imposing such measures on the broader community.

Next steps

Gurule emphasized that the plan is adaptable and will be reviewed annually and more thoroughly every 3-5 years to assess progress and identify gaps. Having periodic reviews would also give the County the

opportunity to pivot, if needed, or to redefine its goals.

Gurule reminded Council that any actions requiring funding will need to be approved by the County Manager and County Council. She added that the plan is not heavily contingent on federal funding. "We're relying heavily on education and outreach and goodwill and voluntary action from our community."

	FOCUS AREA & STRATEGIES	EXAMPLE ACTIONS
	Buildings & Energy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase building efficiency and decarbonization Increase renewable energy generation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage energy efficiency and electrification retrofits Expand electric energy resiliency
	Transportation & Land Use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand EV infrastructure and adoption Expand and promote multi-modal connectivity and sustainable land use planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop EV infrastructure plan Expand mixed-use, transit-oriented development policies Encourage multimodal transportation
	Materials & Consumption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximize waste diversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand and refine waste data tracking, reporting, and goals
	Natural Systems & Water <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase urban green space Conserve water resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote urban forest stewardship and tree preservation Provide greywater reuse education
	Community Resilience & Wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance community understanding of climate change Prepare the community for climate impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in public climate education campaigns Encourage adaptation upgrades
	Cross-cutting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage sustainable businesses Promote climate education outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a sustainable business certification Expand community partnerships

Climate Action Plan Focus Areas

Local News Coverage

Kirsten Laskey, *Los Alamos Daily Post*, Nov 21, 2024: Los Alamos County Council Approves Climate Action Plan
<https://ladailypost.com/los-alamos-county-council-approves-climate-action-plan/>

Stephanie Nakhleh, *Boomtown*, Nov 14, 2024: County Council tackles climate issues, fire station location, open-space concerns
<https://www.boomtownlosalamos.org/p/climate-action-plan-adopted>

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report – County Council – November 19

Community Broadband Network; Purchase of Property on Diamond Drive

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

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

Community Broadband Network

The Council awarded two major contracts related to the Community Broadband Network (CBN). Community Broadband Manager Jerry Smith provided background and details about each contract:

- **\$35M Contract for Design and Construction:** A 6–0 vote (with Councilor Hand absent) authorized a \$35 million contract with Bonfire Engineering & Construction. This project will provide high-speed internet access to 10,014 locations. The plan includes initially constructing 60% of the "drops" (connections from the curb to homes or businesses), with the remainder to be built as customer demand arises. The project will begin with a seven-month design phase, followed by a 30-month construction period. The funding for the construction will come from the 2023 Capital Improvement Plan budget and the issuance of Gross Receipts Tax revenue bonds.
- **\$15.9M Contract for Network Management:** A 6–0 vote (with Councilor Hand absent) approved a separate \$15.9 million contract with Bonfire Fiber for managing the CBN once operational. This management agreement will involve working directly with internet service providers (ISPs) that provide the service to

customers. The operations agreement will have an initial five-year term, with three additional five-year renewal options, totaling up to 20 years.

Smith emphasized to Council that these approvals are critical steps in advancing the County's effort to establish a robust broadband infrastructure, providing high-speed internet to residents and businesses while fostering a competitive ISP marketplace.

County Manager Anne Laurent highlighted the long history of the CBN, which has been discussed for over a decade, and emphasized its goal to bring fiber connectivity to every premise in the community. While some areas in town already have fiber, Laurent reminded Council that the majority of the community does not and that current average internet speeds are below those in other communities.

Smith provided additional details on the project, noting that in about seven months the Council will receive a low-level design that will include specific construction details, such as where existing poles can be used and where underground installation is necessary. This design will also include a detailed timeline. The first areas for installation will be decided based on logic and approval by Council.

Once approved by Council, construction can begin, with the goal of completing the project in 30 months, and initial installations starting in 20 months. Service will be made available to residents as soon as the new fiber reaches their homes, with minimal downtime expected during construction.

Smith outlined the roles of the three key entities involved in the network's operation: the County as owner, Bonfire as operator, and the ISPs who will handle customer service and billing. Customers will see fees for each of these entities in their monthly bills. Residential rates are expected to range from \$50 to \$100 per month for service speeds from 250 Mbps to 50 Gbps, while business rates will range \$75 to \$240 per month for these speeds. The fees include a Network Infrastructure Fee of \$10 per month charged by the County to reinvest in the system for future expansions and to maintain

the infrastructure, which is expected to last 30 to 40 years.

Public comment

During the public comments, several concerns were raised about the broadband project, particularly regarding its potential impact on local ISPs, transparency, and hidden costs. Key points from the public included:

- **Impact on Local ISPs:** Some speakers expressed concern about how the project might affect local ISPs, raising questions about competition, market share, and potential negative consequences for smaller local businesses.
- **Need for Transparency and Hidden Costs:** There were calls for greater transparency regarding the project's costs, particularly concerning potential hidden fees for residents and businesses. These concerns focused on ensuring that the public has a clear understanding of how the project's expenses will be handled and how costs will be passed on to consumers.
- **Economic Development and Affordability:** Several community members stressed the importance of high-speed broadband for local economic development, noting that the project could bring significant benefits, particularly in providing affordable internet access to underserved areas.

Some speakers emphasized the urgency of moving forward. Others asked that approval of the contracts be delayed to allow more community engagement and careful consideration of local business implications.

Council discussion

During its discussion, Council focused on how best to create a resilient, accessible, and efficient internet infrastructure while addressing concerns regarding costs, public involvement, and service options. Key points included:

- **Middle Mile Project for Resiliency:** The Middle Mile project in San Ildefonso Pueblo

will provide a second fiber optic line up the hill that will be used by the CBN. Smith emphasized that this project will be critical for providing another route into the County in case of a catastrophic failure, ensuring quick rerouting and minimal downtime to avoid community-wide internet outages.

- **Funding for Low-Income Households:** Councilor Havemann inquired about funding mechanisms for lower-income households and the possibility of creating a program similar to the county's utility assistance funds. Smith explained that the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) ended due to lack of congressional funding but there are ongoing efforts to replace it with a state-level program to help pay for internet service.
- **Compensation for Existing Providers:** Councilor Cull raised concerns about compensating existing service providers whose infrastructure might be used. Smith explained that any existing fiber-based assets will be evaluated and, based on cost/benefit considerations, the County would lease these assets to save on construction costs and speed up service delivery.
- **Public Awareness and Participation:** Responding to a question from Councilor Cull, Smith assured that the County would educate residents about the construction schedule and options for ISPs. There are currently three providers in the county, including a local one. He mentioned that residents would have the option to stay with their current provider if they so choose.

Summarizing her perspective on the motion to approve the contract, Chair Derkacs highlighted that the CBN project has been a strategic priority for the Council since 2021 and has seen broad public support through various meetings. She emphasized that delaying the project further would not be beneficial due to time constraints.

Purchase of Property on Diamond Drive

At another public hearing, Council discussed a \$9.85M purchase agreement for three properties at 1183, 1377, and 1399 Diamond Drive, opposite Los Alamos High School. While acknowledging concerns about the high asking price, County Manager Anne Laurent highlighted the potential long-term strategic benefits and community impacts of the proposed purchase:

- **Centralized Social Services Hub:** The properties offer a potential opportunity to develop a hub that could expand access to critical health services (behavioral, mental, and physical) and essential social services to address community needs.
- **Affordable and Workforce Housing:** The purchase could help alleviate the community's housing shortage by providing affordable and workforce housing options.
- **Educational Partnerships:** The proximity to Los Alamos High School and University of New Mexico-Los Alamos presents an opportunity to create an "educational zone" that could foster collaboration and partnerships.
- **Economic Development:** The properties could help spur retail, commercial, and mixed-use development, enhancing the vibrancy and services available in the area.
- **Strategic Location:** The central and accessible location is ideal for serving the needs of the community.

Public comments raised concerns about the high price of the properties, which are well above their assessed values, potential impact on local businesses, and the urgency of the deal.

Councilors debated the merits, with some emphasizing the strategic value and others highlighting the cost and lack of public input.

- Councilor Cull questioned the urgency of the purchase. Laurent explained the limited time frame given by the seller.
- Councilor Havemann expressed a desire to delay the decision, calling for further public

input and thoughtful consideration of the strategic goals and potential benefits.

- Councilor Ryti also supported the delay, stressing the importance of due diligence and public engagement.

Councilor Reagor moved to reject the purchase agreement, citing the high cost and lack of public input. However, his motion failed by a 1–5 vote, with only Councilor Reagor in favor and Councilor Hand absent. Council then voted 6–0, with Councilor Hand absent, to continue the public hearing at the next Council meeting on December 3, 2024.

Local news coverage

- Nov 23, 2024, *Los Alamos Daily Post*. Video: Councilor David Reagor Discusses Nov. 19 Meeting. <https://ladailypost.com/video-councilor-david-reagor-discusses-nov-19-meeting/>
- Kirsten Laskey, Nov 21, 2024. *Los Alamos Daily Post*. Council Moves Forward On Broadband And Tables Purchase Of Diamond Drive Properties To Tuesday Dec 3. <https://ladailypost.com/?s=Council+Moves+Forward+On+Broadband+>
- Maire O'Neill, *Los Alamos Reporter*, Nov 22, 2024: Decision Postponed on County Purchase of Diamond Drive Properties, Broadband Funding Approved During Long and Contentious Council Meeting. <https://losalamosreporter.com/2024/11/22/decision-postponed-on-county-purchase-of-diamond-drive-properties-broadband-funding-approved-during-long-and-contentious-council-meeting/>
- Stephanie Nakhleh, *Boomtown*, Nov 21, 2024: Contentious land purchase postponed https://www.boomtownlosalamos.org/p/contentious-land-purchase-postponed?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report – Planning and Zoning Commission – November 20

Commissioners present: Rachel Adler (Chair), Stephanie Nakhleh (Vice Chair), Marlon Brown, Karen Easton, David Hampton, Benjamin Hill, Rebecca White

Commissioners absent: Katherine Bruell, Ronald Nelson

Civilian Women’s Dormitory

By unanimous vote (7–0, with two absent), the Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Commission approved the County's application to rezone its property, the Civilian Women’s Dormitory, at 1725 17th Street (see photo) from its current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District to the Institutional (INS) Zone District.

Background

Linda Matteson, Deputy County Administrator, provided historical context. The building is one of the last Manhattan Project era properties in the area; rezoning was sought because the County's desired uses are prohibited in the current zoning district.

Tonight was the second time that the Commission held a public hearing on the County's rezoning application. At the first hearing on August 28, 2024, the majority of the Commission was in favor of the requested rezoning (3–2, with two absent). However, Commission approval requires at least four affirmative votes. Since this threshold was not met, the application was sent to the County Council without a recommendation from the Commission. [See observer report for the August 28 P&Z meeting in the September 2024 LWVLA Update.]

At its October 29 meeting, County Council remanded the case back to the P&Z Commission for another public hearing and recommendation. [See observer report for the October 29 Council meeting in the November 2024 LWVLA Update.]

Commission discussion

Commissioners discussed the criteria for approval, with some expressing concerns about the impact on neighboring properties, the need for land available for affordable housing, and the potential for future changes in use.

Chair Adler acknowledged the quandary of rezoning residential land as institutional despite concerns about the availability of housing in the county. "In this case, for me, [it] comes down to values, and how much value you place on this parcel and this structure that is one of two buildings in the town that were constructed as part of the Manhattan Project," she said. "I think it is a piece of land that is instrumental, and the reason that our town exists. In terms of the comprehensive plan and conformance with the goals of the county, in terms of the values weighing for residential properties against an irreplaceable asset, for me, that's a clear choice."

Commissioner Nakhleh also cast her vote in favor of the rezoning while expressing her misgivings. "The affordable housing plan says we need 2,400 new housing units by 2029 to maintain economic stability. So, I'm wondering [about] the county's determination that INS zoning is more advantageous to the community than the current residential zoning," she said.

Approval of rezoning

The P&Z voted to approve the amendment, emphasizing the historical significance of the building and its alignment with the county's goals.



Women’s Dorm Building east elevation facing 17th Street, Google Earth Street Image, November 2022

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Activities of the Los Alamos County Health Council (CHC) in 2024

Activities Including the Following Initiatives:

Initiative #1: Addressing Priority Areas for Community Health Outreach

Regular monthly articles by CHC members in the local press

Outreach events including:

- Grandparents Raising Grandkids inaugural event (May)
- Celebrate Recovery event at SALA Events Center (September)
- Swag bags handed out at LAMC drive-thru vaccine clinic (October)
- Older Adult Summit held at SALA Events Center (October)
- Social Services Case Coordination Specialist was available at weekly Farmers' Markets
- Social Services Case Coordination Specialist was available at both libraries once a week

Initiative #2: Implementation of Unite Us Closed Loop Software

Unite Us is a software platform used to coordinate closed-loop referrals within the area and share trusted resources securely. It provides insights to inform decision-making with comprehensive social care data. Thousands of government, healthcare, community-based organizations, agencies, and institutions of all sizes throughout the nation partner with Unite Us to support whole-person care.

Implementation "go-live" date was 5/31/24

Key providers are on board (Self Help, JJAB, Family Council, LA Social Services), with plans for more to join in 2025

Social Services received 11 requests in the first 5 months; Self Help received 29.

Initiative #3: Completing the Comprehensive Health Plan (CHP)

Interim CHP was presented to County Council on 3/26/24.

Short-term action items completed or in process:

- Social Services Division hired Older Adult Case Coordination Specialist
- Increased outreach/education from CHC
- Completed Opioid Settlement Funding plan
- Issued and analyzed a community-wide Health Care Accessibility and Quality survey (1,040 responses received)

Final CHP will be presented to County Council on 12/17/24.

Educational Activities Including:

- Learning about NM Department of Health budget, deliverables, and community outreach
- Presentations about community resources: Los Alamos Community Foundation (by Liz Martineau); Los Alamos Chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous

Planned Future Activities Including:

- Additional outreach programs such as suicide prevention QPR trainings (Question, Persuade, Refer training for laypersons); mental health trainings such as Mental Health First Aid (MHFA); opioid overdose prevention activities
- Supporting youth and family mental health (topics may include bullying and reaching out to new audiences)
- Continuing to support state initiatives, such as the Assisted Outpatient Treatment Court through 1st Judicial Court, in collaboration with Santa Fe County and Rio Arriba County

Lisa Hampton, LWVLA Director of Community Health and Wellbeing

November Lunch with a Leader: Dan Osborn

In addition to his job as Housing and Special Projects Manager, Dan Osborn is currently the interim Co-Director of the Community Development Department and the Planning Manager. At this meeting he presented a basic overview of housing in Los Alamos, but offered to answer questions about other planning matters as well.

Osborn grew up in Westminster, outside Denver, and began his career in community development there in 1997. He left the area because the “Front Range was growing so crazy and fast” and came to Los Alamos. He served as senior planner for about 18 months, during which he was the review planner for the Smith’s development. He returned to Colorado to be the community development director for Salida, where he “did a lot of really cool things like sections of the Arkansas River Trail that go through the town” and also helped develop an extensive multi-modal trail system. After that he worked for a decade in Summit County, where he oversaw many affordable housing projects.

The County’s previous Affordable Housing Plan was updated in 2010. Osborn felt that it was too prescriptive; it had just two parts: a homebuyer loan program and a home rehabilitation loan program, both administered by the Housing Partnership. An updated plan in compliance with the State Affordable Housing Act was necessary to enable Los Alamos County to donate or pay for land, finance building improvements, and cover a wide range of project costs in support of affordable housing.

The new Affordable Housing Plan was approved by the Council on August 27, 2024. However, the Housing Partnership was dissolved in July and the director, Steve Brugger, has retired. There has been no provider since then, but Osborn said he will bring a service agreement for a new provider to Council on December 3.

We know that there is not sufficient supply to meet the current demand and there are not many locations in Los Alamos where additional housing can be developed. The lack of capital, shortage of labor and materials as well as the surge of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) hiring have contributed to the problem. Osborn said the increased demand will continue to put upward pressure on housing prices for the foreseeable future unless additional supply is added to the market. He added, “My feeling is that we need to provide housing for all income levels of folks in all stages of life regardless of who their employer, where their paychecks come from.”

We will not capture all the people coming up the Hill; they don’t all want to live here, but getting some of them off the road will reduce traffic congestion and improve air and environmental quality. The 10-year goal is to build 2,500 additional units, 150-250 new units a year, to stabilize prices. Of those, 15-20 should be permanently affordable.

Money has been budgeted to provide the services for homebuyer assistance in the form of a non-amortizing loan. The recipient of the loan can repay at 1.5% interest if the house is sold within a certain length of time. After that time, there is no need to repay. Home renewal plans work in a similar manner. The new code provides for less prescriptive management by the County. The provider will be the conduit for County and federal funds.

The County has two recently completed affordable housing projects, both on DP Road: Bluffs Senior Apartments and Canyon Walk Apartments, which are full (there is a waiting list).

Osborn described other projects on County land that are in the pipeline:

- The three-acre parcel on 20th St., which is zoned and ready to be developed. The County received three proposals and is currently working on the development contract, which includes a couple hundred housing units, retail, and an addition to the Canyon Rim Trail.
- A-8 on DP Rd. southeast of the Bluffs. Three bids have been received, all with an affordability component. The preferred respondent proposes multiple unit types. The next step will be to hammer out a development agreement.

In response to questions, Osborn listed some of the other projects awaiting development.

- Mari-Mac is owned by Columbus Capital; they received approval to build 322 units and 5,000 square feet of retail, but “the economics don’t work for them at present.”
- “North Mesa Housing” is an initiative to build housing on 30 acres owned by the schools. Osborn is collecting data on water, sewer, and transportation to determine what improvements will be needed. He said he expects to come back [to this project] in May.
- The Hilltop House site is owned by a California company that is proposing a 50-60 unit extended stay model for LANL employees. Osborn thinks it will go to the P&Z in January.
- In White Rock there are two projects that have been approved: housing on Longview and mixed-use in Mirador.

Clearly there are many upcoming projects to help alleviate the housing shortage.

Barbara Calef

LWVLA Board of Directors 2024-2025

Officers:

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Newsletter Publisher; Membership; Archivist: Bob Williams

Publicity: Jody Benson



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 November 19, 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 session on the above date. All items are subject to change.

- Use of Opioid Settlement Funds to Expand Prevention Services in Los Alamos Public Schools
 - 12/03/24 meeting. Possible action to approve MOA amendment.
- Los Alamos County Health Council
 - 12/03/24 meeting. Briefing by Chair of Health Council. No action requested.
- Purchase of Property at 1183, 1377, and 1399 Diamond Drive
 - 12/03/24 meeting. Public hearing and possible action.
- Wildlife Education Campaign and Wildlife Ordinances
 - 12/17/24 meeting. Briefing and possible action.
- Comprehensive Health Plan
 - 12/17/24 meeting. Discussion and possible plan adoption.
- Electrification Study
 - 12/17/24 meeting. DPU Presentation. No action requested.
- Current Regional and Intergovernmental Issues
 - 12/17/24 meeting. Briefing. No action requested

eComment Tool for Council meetings:

You can use the County's eComment tool to submit comments. Submit them at:

<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 November 30, 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 3
 - No terms ending soon
- Personnel Board 0
 - 1 term ending March 31, 2025
- Planning and Zoning Commission 0
 - 3 terms ending March 31, 2025
- Transportation Board 0
 - 3 terms ending Feb 28, 2025

Totals: 10 vacancies, 15 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.

<i>In this issue</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Calendar</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>No December Lunch with a Leader</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>President’s Message: Our Work Continues</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Change Is Coming!</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Observer Corps Report – County Council – November 12</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Observer Corps Report – County Council – November 19</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Observer Corps Report – Planning and Zoning Commission – November 20</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Activities of the Los Alamos County Health Council (CHC) in 2024</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>November Lunch with a Leader: Dan Osborn</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies</i>	<i>15</i>

League of Women Voters of Los Alamos
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