

# LWW LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS<sup>®</sup> OF LOS ALAMOS

## UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos  
P.O. Box 158, Los Alamos, NM 87544  
<https://my.lww.org/new-mexico/los-alamos>  
Volume 77, Number 9, January 2025

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### ***Calendar***

January 6 Legislative Preview, Fuller Lodge, 7 p.m. (6:30 p.m. for refreshments)  
January 9 LWWNM Legislative Preview, on Zoom  
January 12 LWWLA Membership Party, 3-5 p.m. at the home of Ellen Mills  
January 16 Lunch With a Leader, Unitarian Church, Taraka Dale, noon  
January 21 NM Legislature convenes at noon  
January 23 Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon  
February 2 Program Planning Party, 1577 Camino Medio, North Mesa, 3-5 p.m.  
February 5 LWWNM Legislative Reception, La Fonda, Santa Fe, 5:30-7:30 p.m.  
February 6 League Day at the Legislature, State Land Office, 10 a.m.-noon

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## **January Lunch with a Leader: Taraka Dale**



*Los Alamos National  
Laboratory stock photo*

Taraka Dale will be our speaker for the January 16 Lunch with a Leader program from noon to 1 p.m. at the Unitarian Church. Dr. Taraka Dale grew up in northwestern Pennsylvania, in a rural area between Pittsburgh and Erie. In 1999, she received her B.S. in Biochemistry from Allegheny College. Since then, apart from a few years in Chicago, she has spent the bulk of her adult and professional life in the mountain west, receiving her Ph.D. in Biochemistry from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2005 and spending a year in Utah before moving to Los Alamos in 2007.

During her 17 years in the Bioscience Division at LANL, Dale has progressed from Postdoctoral Researcher to Principal Investigator, and for the past 2 years her primary role has been to serve as the Group Leader for B Division's Microbial and Biome Sciences Group. In 2023, she was honored by *Biofuels Digest* as one of the "500 most innovative, transformative leaders in the advanced bioeconomy," and she received the R.A. Glenn Award for the "most innovative and interesting paper" presented at the American Chemical Society Energy and Fuels Division Symposium. Today she will be talking about B Division's work on tackling plastic pollution and developing more sustainable plastics for the future.

*Karyl Ann Armbruster*

## **A Lesson in Recycling**

Where does our recycling go? This is a question I have often heard from Los Alamos residents. So, in December I traveled to BARCO, the destination for the contents of our blue bins. Paul Rougemont, the manager, led me and a small group of Albuquerque residents on a tour of the facility and responded to our questions.

The recycling plant was built in 2013. It currently receives 200 tons of material a day. Of that, 30% is trash and ends up in the landfill. Most of the trash consists of single use plastic bags, but there are also extension cords, Christmas trees, and hoses, as well as food. Especially damaging are lithium-ion batteries, which cause 99.9% of the fires in the facility. (Fortunately, they are quickly extinguished.)

All kinds of paper can be recycled. There are many different grades. White paper is high value, \$370 a ton. Shredded paper should be placed in CLEAR plastic bags, which the workers empty into a bin. (Plastic bags that are not clear go into the trash unopened.) We saw a bale of shredded white paper, mostly from LANL. Mixed paper includes chipboard, coated paper (e.g., milk cartons) and Tetra Paks, worth \$22 to \$35 a ton. Cardboard sells for \$115 a ton.

Plastics seem to raise the most questions. Items with the Resin Identification Code 1, 2 or 5 (the number inside the triangle) are the most valuable. In fact, last year #2 was more valuable than aluminum! Before they go into the blue bin, they should be rinsed out. The cap can be re-attached but should not be put in separately.

Rougemont said that “3-7s,” meaning items with the resin identification code 3, 4, 6 or 7, are hardest to get rid of. There is little to no profit in recycling them. However, they are bundled together, baled, and sold. Some bales go to Mexico where they are incinerated to produce energy. The others go to markets in Asia.

For a quick list of recyclables, go to <https://www.losalamosnm.us/Services/Waste-and-Recycling/Recycle>.

## **Except for shredded paper, please Do Not Bag recyclables.**

Here is a more detailed list:

### **Acceptable Materials**

#### *Paper products of all kinds*

- Newspaper and advertising inserts
- Junk or advertising mail and envelopes
- All office paper, colored or white paper
- Milk cartons
- Tetra Paks
- Paperback and softcover books
- Magazines, catalogs, and phone books
- Paper bags
- Unused paper cups and plates
- Construction paper
- Heavyweight folders
- Shredded paper (in clear bags)

#### *Cardboard*

- Cereal and all similar boxes
- Cardboard egg cartons
- Flattened cardboard boxes – large boxes can be taken to dumpsters at Sullivan Field, the Eco station, and the Overlook Convenience Center.
- Kitchen or toilet paper rolls

#### *Metal*

- Aluminum cans
- Canned food cans and their caps or lids
- Clean aluminum foil

## Unacceptable Materials

- Aerosol containers (bring to Eco station)
- Plastic bags or film (can be recycled at Smith's)
- Tires or car parts
- Diapers
- Styrofoam
- Medical waste
- Clothing or shoes
- Scrap metal (bring to Eco station)
- Anything with a plug
- Fire arms or ammunition
- Lithium-ion batteries
- Flexible plastics — shower curtains and hoses, for example
- Toys with motors
- Coolers with Styrofoam interior
- Vinyl plastics — pipe, siding, lattice/fencing

*Barbara Calef*

## ***President's Message: Let's Get Together!***

As we enter the new year, slowly and then all at once, we find a number of state and local League events on the calendar. In preparation for the upcoming New Mexico Legislative Session, the Los Alamos League and the AAUW are co-hosting a Legislative Preview at Fuller Lodge on January 6 at 7 p.m.; come for refreshments at 6:30.

The state League is hosting its Legislative Preview on January 9, on Zoom. After the session begins on January 21, several Los Alamos League members will travel to Santa Fe for the state League Legislative Reception on February 5, and for League Day at the Legislature on February 6. If you've never been, consider joining us, particularly at the Roundhouse for League Day. We set up a table to share information about voting and advocacy, speak with our legislators, and generally enjoy the buzz and energy of being in that beautiful building with many other education-focused organizations and engaged visitors.

Closer to home, mark your calendars now and join us on Sunday, January 12 at Ellen Mills's lovely home for our annual membership party, 3-5 p.m. With no speakers, tips on lobbying, or bill analysis, this will be a social event to connect with one another informally. Of course, in this community that often means uncovering ways in which you are already connected aside from membership in the League. I think sometimes if my connections around the community were shown in a Venn diagram, it would look like a mass of bubbles. The theme for food and drink will be light Italian. Spouses and other family members are welcome, but, you can just bring yourself. Let's get together!

*Felicia Orth*

## ***Legislative Preview on January 6***

The LWV-AAUW Legislative Preview will take place in Fuller Lodge on Monday, January 6, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Come at 6:30 for refreshments and to socialize.

Our legislators— Representative Christine Chandler, Senator Leo Jaramillo, and Senator Roberto Gonzales — will be speaking. In addition, Kristina Fisher will explain Think New Mexico's proposals for addressing the healthcare worker shortage in the state.

All of the speakers will answer questions from the audience.

The 2025 New Mexico Legislative Session will begin in Santa Fe at noon on January 21 and continue for 60 days, ending at noon on March 22.

## ***LWVLA Program Planning Party February 2***

All League members are invited to participate in the Program Planning Party from 3 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, February 2 at the home of Ellen Mills. We will enjoy savory and sweet snacks followed by a discussion about our positions and plans for action. You can find our local positions on our website at <https://my.lwv.org/new-mexico/los-alamos>. Please take a look to see if there is something missing. We can also lobby our local government using local, state and national League positions. Every League member has the opportunity to influence how the League will focus its time, talent, and funds. To keep the League vital, it is important that a large number of League members participate in this event.

In addition, we will discuss issues for the state League to consider at the LWVNM Convention in Santa Fe on April 26-27. The state positions are on-line at <http://www.lwvnm.org/positions.html>. All state positions are subject to approval by the delegates at the LWVNM Convention. League advocacy must be based on our positions. What are we missing?

*Barbara Calef*

## ***League Days at the Legislature: February 5 and 6***

Members will receive a Constant Contact with more details including information on nearby hotels and lunch options.

**Legislative Reception** – La Fonda Hotel, Santa Fe, Wednesday, February 5, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

The speaker will be Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver.

**League Day at the Legislature:** Thursday, February 6

8 a.m. to 2 p.m. – **in the State Capitol West Hall of History**

Three informational tables

10 a.m. to noon – **in the State Land Office, Morgan Hall, 310 Old Santa Fe Trail**

10:00 to 10:30 – Orientation to League Day

10:30 to 11:15 – Molly Swank, Executive Director, Common Cause, New Mexico –  
Modernization of the Legislature and Legislative Salaries

11:15 to noon – New Mexico State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard –  
Increasing Gas & Oil Royalty Rates and Diversification of Revenue from  
State Lands

# **Observer Corps Report – County Council – December 3**

## *Purchase of Diamond Drive Properties; Affordable Housing Contract; Regional Landfill Study; 2025 Strategic Leadership Plan*

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

Our observer report is based on discussion during the meeting and documentation provided in the full agenda package. This report was prepared with the assistance of two artificial intelligence software applications: Otter.ai and ChatGPT

### **Purchase of Diamond Drive Properties**

Voting 2–5, Council rejected a motion to purchase three parcels of property on Diamond Drive, with Councilors Derkacs and Lepsch in favor of the purchase, and Councilors Cull, Hand, Havemann, Reagor and Ryti in opposition.

### *Proposed site for a social services hub*

The public hearing on the proposed purchase of three properties opposite Los Alamos High School was a continuation from the Council's November 19, 2024, meeting. The main issue was the proposed \$9.85 million purchase agreement for the land, which was valued by the County assessor at \$5.6 million, plus an estimated \$1 million for abatement, demolition, and site improvements. Despite the discrepancy in valuation, the property owner was asking for \$9.8 million, with a requested sale close date of December 17, 2024.

County Manager Anne Laurent highlighted the opportunity to build a much-needed social services hub on the site. Jessica Strong, Social Services Division Manager, emphasized

the limitations of the current facility, which is cramped and unable to meet the increasing number of clients, many of whom require multiple visits. According to the County staff report, the idea for the Social Services Hub has been discussed for years but has been delayed in large part due to the challenge of finding an appropriate site. In concert with the nearly completed Community Health Plan [see observer report for Council's meeting on 12/17/24 in this issue], the proposed land purchase could enable the project to move forward.

Laurent also addressed public concerns about the County's land holdings, noting that despite owning a large acreage, finding a suitable location for the hub has been difficult. Over the past decade, the County has sold or donated 32 acres for private development to increase housing stock. Laurent pointed out that most of the remaining undeveloped land is either designated for parks or open space, or is already committed to other development projects, such as affordable housing or mixed-use developments. Consequently, she concluded, the Diamond Drive properties are among the few large enough to accommodate the social services hub.

### *Public comments*

Public comments on the proposed Diamond Drive property purchase were mixed. While there was widespread support for the concept of a social services hub, the majority expressed opposition to the high purchase price of the properties. Concerns were raised about the lack of transparency in the process and insufficient opportunities for public engagement.

A number of commenters supported the purchase, citing the potential long-term benefits for the community. They argued that the strategic location, combined with the pressing need for a centralized social services hub, justified the higher cost. Some supporters also emphasized that purchasing the land would provide the County with greater control over its future use.

## *Council discussion*

Democratic process: Councilor Havemann said, "First, I'd like to say that, from my vantage point, this is how the process is supposed to work. County Council formulated strategic goals based on community input and dialogue, and they've been kind of massaged over many years. And those goals include economic vitality, housing, and improved access to social services. County staff then took those goals, and when an opportunity presented itself, they came back to Council for guidance on whether that option should be pursued and Council gave the green light."

Acknowledging public opposition: Although Councilor Havemann made the motion to approve the sale, she said she would not vote for it, acknowledging that the majority who spoke about the sale expressed opposition. "This was not an easy decision," she said, "as I worry about the opportunity cost and the risk that this land sits vacant or it sits unsightly, or is developed in ways that don't help us make progress with our strategic goals." She expressed the hope that if the current owner keeps the property, he will do something "fabulous for the community."

Legal implications of the anti-donation clause: Councilor Cull asked County Attorney Alvin Leaphart to respond to public concerns about the legality of the purchase under the state's anti-donation clause. Leaphart explained that the anti-donation clause prohibits governments from selling or leasing land below fair market value. He went on to say that negotiated contracts are exempt from the anti-donation clause, citing over 30 precedential cases and a memo from the New Mexico Finance Authority. He pointed out that the courts generally do not interfere with local governments conducting business and making deals to get what they need. "The claim that the County is violating the code is simply demonstrably false," Leaphart concluded.

Inappropriate use of public funds: Councilor Reagor strongly opposed the proposed property purchase. He contended that the purchase of land and the creation of a social services hub are two separate issues,

and that it was not necessary to purchase the Diamond Drive property to move forward with the social services project. Given its highly inflated price, Reagor felt that the land purchase deal looked like an inappropriate use of public funds, raising doubts in the public's eye about the integrity of the process.

Councilor Hand agreed with Councilor Reagor. "Simply stated, this property purchase is too expensive. If it was me personally, I wouldn't buy something like this just with my personal money. And so how could I do this with our County's money? I think we should look somewhere else to consider other ideas to move forward with an SSD [Social Services Division] hub."

## **Affordable Housing Service contract**

In a unanimous vote (5–0, with Councilors Lepsch and Ryti absent), Council approved a service agreement with Santa Fe Community Housing Trust for services to implement, manage, and report on a comprehensive suite of affordable housing programs and services.

### *Scope of Service Contract*

Housing and Special Projects Manager Dan Osborn explained that the Housing Partnership informed the County in March 2024 that they would no longer provide services, leading to the need to dissolve contracts and issue an RFP for a new provider. The RFP process resulted in selecting the Santa Fe Community Housing Trust, and the agreement was being presented for Council approval.

Osborn described how the terms of the service agreement with the Santa Fe Community Housing Trust cover several affordable housing programs and expand eligibility for homebuyer assistance and home rehabilitation programs from 80% to 120% of Area Median Income (AMI). The seven-year agreement includes a \$2 million budget, with \$400,000 allocated for loans.

Programs and services are targeted to engage a diverse population of first-time home buyers, seniors, and populations at risk of homelessness, he said. The new partnership

aims to increase homeownership rates and financial literacy.

- The Homebuyer Assistance Program will assist first-time homebuyers with financial barriers to homeownership. The program will utilize HUD-certified counseling staff and offer a comprehensive homebuyer education program, workshops, and down payment assistance.
- The Housing Rehabilitation Program will provide grants and low-interest loans for essential home repairs, accessibility modifications, and energy-efficiency upgrades.

Under this service contract, the Housing Trust will also work with the County to determine future needs and alternative programs to serve the community. Examples of such programs include:

- Shared Equity Housing Programs to create long-term affordable homeownership.
- Acquisition of land in Los Alamos for development of homes for low- and moderate-income families.
- Management of permanent affordability requirements and properties
- Acquisition and rehabilitation of vacant, underutilized, or abandoned properties to increase affordable housing units.

Councilor Derkacs said "I'm looking forward to this program to replace the program that we lost. This is an important service to the community, and especially with the new affordable housing plan and the broader range of eligibility, hopefully we can serve more people in the community."

## Regional Landfill Study

In a unanimous vote (5–0, with Councilors Lepsch and Ryti absent), Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Española and Rio Arriba County for a regional landfill study.

Juan Rael, Public Works Director, explained that the current waste disposal facility in Sandoval County is nearing its end of life and that the MOA aims to study regional

waste production and find a new site. The feasibility study, funded by a \$150,000 budget, is necessary due to the expected closure of the current facility within less than three years.

## 2025 Strategic Leadership Plan

In a unanimous vote (5–0, with Councilors Lepsch and Ryti absent), Council approved its updated 2025 Strategic Leadership Plan.

In general, Council agreed to the same five goals and 22 priorities as in the 2024 plan, updated to reflect adoption of the Climate Action Plan and Affordable Housing Plan. As a next step, each priority will be assigned measurable objectives based on updated Management Action Plans (MAPs), adopted plans, and approved programs and projects.

## Local News Coverage

Denise Derkacs (Dec 5, 2024). Video: Council Chair Derkacs Shares Meeting Highlights. *Los Alamos Daily Post*. <https://ladailypost.com/video-council-chair-derkacs-shares-meeting-highlights/>

Kirsten Laskey (Dec 5, 2024), Council Walks Away From Buying Diamond Drive Properties. *Los Alamos Daily Post*. <https://ladailypost.com/council-walks-away-from-buying-diamond-drive-properties/>

Kirsten Laskey (Dec 12, 2024). Council OKs Contract To Continue Assisting Home Owners. *Los Alamos Daily Post*. <https://ladailypost.com/council-oks-contract-to-continue-assisting-home-owners/>

Los Alamos County News Release (Dec 11, 2024). Los Alamos County Partners With The Housing Trust To Address Affordable Housing Needs. *Los Alamos Reporter*. <https://losalamosreporter.com/2024/12/11/los-alamos-county-partners-with-the-housing-trust-to-address-affordable-housing-needs/>

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*



# **Observer Corps Report – County Council – December 17**

## *Re-zoning the Women's Dorm Building Property; Comprehensive Health Plan; Wildlife Feeding Ordinance*

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

Our observer report is based on discussion during the meeting and documentation provided in the full agenda package. This report was prepared with the assistance of two artificial intelligence software applications: Otter.ai and ChatGPT.

### **Rezoning the Women's Dormitory Building Property**

The Los Alamos County Council held a public hearing to consider the County's application to rezone the property at 1725 17th Street — the location of the Women's Dormitory Building — from single-family residential (SF-4) to institutional (INS) zoning. The motion to approve the rezoning passed 6–1, with Councilor Reagor in opposition.

Speaking for the applicant, Project Manager Russell Naranjo explained the County's plan to renovate the Women's Dormitory Building into a visitor center with museum exhibits and associated office space for a caretaker's unit for the National Park Service to operate the Manhattan Project National Historic Park. Moving forward with this plan, however, requires a minor zone map amendment.

The Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Commission recommended that Council approve the rezoning application, having ruled that it met all review criteria, including alignment with the County's long-term vision zoning goals, the future land use map, and the Comprehensive Plan [see the November 2024 LWVLA *Update*].

Voting in opposition to the rezoning request, Councilor Reagor advocated for a more flexible zoning option that could accommodate housing options.

Having secured Council's approval of the rezoning request, "We will continue with the development of the project and present the site plan to the P&Z Commission for review, public comment and action," said Naranjo.

### **Comprehensive Health Plan**

By unanimous vote (7–0), the Council adopted the 2024 Comprehensive Health Plan.

Jessica Strong, Social Services Manager, presented the final 2024 Comprehensive Health Plan. The Plan builds upon the Interim Report that was presented to Council on March 26, 2024 [see May 2024 LWVLA *Update*], and incorporates results of the 2024 Community Health Care Quality and Accessibility Survey. The report includes an action plan with recommendations the County can take to improve overall community health.

### *Los Alamos County Health Care Quality and Accessibility Survey*

Strong summarized survey results. The 1034 responses received represent a 12% response rate. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative data, with a focus on capturing a diverse range of socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and disability backgrounds.

"Part of the reason for wanting a community-wide survey is just simply to establish a baseline," said Strong. "In order to have a report that gives some recommendations, we wanted to develop that baseline and be able to run the same survey in future years and measure that progress over a longer period of time."

#### Key highlights:

- 85% of respondents self-reported that their overall health is "good" or "excellent."
- 99% of the respondents report having medical insurance, including coverage for their children.

- 91% of people with insurance report that their network covers the specialists they need.
- A majority of respondents are satisfied with dental healthcare available within Los Alamos County (68%) and the overall quality of dental care received (76%).
- For respondents with children, 63% expressed satisfaction with the quality of health care their children received.
- A majority of respondents have not needed to delay or avoid receiving physical or dental health care in the past two years (63 and 76%, respectively), indicating they have been able to get the care they need, when they need it.
- 88% of respondents are able to use the internet or apps to find healthcare services when needed.

#### Challenges:

- 32% of respondents to the survey reported dissatisfaction with the availability of health care in the County, due to provider shortages, limited clinic hours, lack of timely appointments, and/or geographic barriers.
- 35% reported delaying or avoiding seeking medical care when it was needed within the past two years. Reasons cited for this included facing financial difficulties in affording treatment, inability to secure an appointment in a timely fashion, and difficulty finding a provider.
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and respondents who identify as LGBTQ+ reported lower overall health ratings compared to White respondents. This includes lower satisfaction with healthcare services.
- Widespread dissatisfaction was reported for both the availability and quality of mental health care and care for substance use disorders within the county.
- 66% of respondents have sought physical healthcare outside of Los Alamos County, with 20% seeking care for mental health issues, and 27% seeking care for dental needs. Of care sought outside the County,

the most frequent provider needed was for specialty care (for example, dermatology, orthopedics, oncology, etc).

- More people indicated having difficulties affording healthcare services (9%), accessing affordable housing (10%), challenges with affording basic living expenses (9%) and accessing affordable food (8%) than indicated utilizing Social Services for help (3%)

### *Final 2024 Comprehensive Health Plan*

"So, what can we do to start addressing some of these key factors?" asked Strong. "How can we improve healthcare in the county?"

Strong outlined the ambitious approach proposed in the Comprehensive Health Plan. The Plan centers on addressing the five Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), listed below, which are the economic and social conditions that significantly influence health outcomes. These nonmedical factors include things like income, education, housing, and social support. By addressing these issues, Strong said, the plan aims to improve health equity and overall health outcomes across the community.

The nine recommendations presented in the plan are designed to be achievable, with measurable actions aimed at creating a healthier and more equitable community for all.

Here's a summary of the key findings and recommendations of the plan:

### **Health Care Access and Quality.**

Community members face issues with availability and accessibility of health care options within the County. There are gaps in community members' knowledge of where/how to find healthcare related services.

- Co-lead the development of a regional, multi-county plan to address healthcare needs across Northern New Mexico.
- Continue to advocate for ways to expand and support the local healthcare workforce:

increased telehealth and video health options; reforming the state's medical malpractice act, expanded licensing of medical professionals; increased loan reimbursement; etc.

- Expand the mental health and substance use continuum of care options available within the County.
- Expand outreach and resources to improve the community's knowledge of health-related services.

## **Economic Stability.**

People who are low income and facing challenges related to income instability, housing insecurity, lack of food, and/or other challenges face issues with availability and accessibility of services.

- Expand available services for low-income individuals and vulnerable people in need through expanded Social Services programming and staffing.

## **Social and Community Context.**

- Improve collaborations and efficiency between organizations by creating a “co-location” Community Action Center that serves as a centralized hub for Social Services and other community organizations that serve low-income / vulnerable people

## **Neighborhoods and the Built Environment.**

The lack of affordable housing and transportation options negatively impacts health outcomes, for patients and staff.

- Support the work of the Community Development Department, other Boards and Commissions, and local and regional partners, on expanding the continuum of affordable housing options.
- Support efforts related to transportation issues that present challenges to people who need to access healthcare outside of Los Alamos County.

## **Education Access and Quality.**

Students and parents want additional ways to address students' social and emotional needs.

- Continue supporting the mental health and substance use services available at the Los Alamos Public Schools (LAPS) through the Prevention specialists. Expand partnerships with other educational entities, including with UNM-LA, and with families whose children are not in the formal school system, to identify and plan additional mental health supports as needed (for example, suicide prevention trainings, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), etc.).

## *Council discussion*

Councilors Ryti and Havemann questioned Strong about the state legislative priorities for which the County should advocate regarding health policies. To date, the County's priorities have never focused on health, noted Councilor Ryti. Councilor Havemann gave examples of complex issues that will require legislative advocacy: the anti-donation clause, regional transportation issues, and the Family Medical Leave Act.

Councilor Reagor highlighted what he felt was the key issue, that funding for services and attracting skilled professionals is the central problem, as opposed to coordination of those services. He pointed out that the cost of paying a physician's malpractice insurance is about the same as a county staff member's salary, underlining the challenge in recruiting and retaining these providers.

Strong gave a nuanced reply. She agreed with Councilor Reagor that attracting more providers is critical, but stressed that improving the coordination of services is also important, especially in cases like social services or juvenile justice. As the demand for outreach, education, and training increases, she added, so does the need for more resource coordination.

Strong also made the point that the key problem with the availability of service providers is not just about increasing the number of providers—it's about ensuring they

have the resources to succeed. This includes things like housing for professionals and expanding contracts for providers to offer more services, which is only feasible if the providers can hire the necessary staff.

Councilor Havemann advocated for the need to recognize and address more subtle health concerns such as hearing loss and early-stage mental health issues like depression and loneliness, especially in the aging population. She observed that priorities in the Comprehensive Health Plan seemed focused on more extreme cases like drug addiction and suicide prevention. Addressing these issues at earlier stages—such as improving hearing and addressing social isolation—could prevent these challenges from escalating into more severe health crises, she said.

Strong acknowledged the Councilor's concern. She noted that, although these issues may not have been explicitly called out, they could fall under the broader category of mental health or mental wellness. Noting the increasing awareness of the negative effects of social isolation, which can exacerbate mental and physical health challenges, Strong agreed that more focus could be placed on these issues. "I think it's a great idea to point out, for making sure we have that included," she said.

Councilor Lepsch continued the discussion about the ongoing challenge of attracting healthcare providers to Los Alamos, with a focus on the barriers to hiring and housing these professionals. "Because our hospital is a for-profit private business, the ability for us to make them do something is almost nil," he said. "We can encourage, coerce, suggest, but ultimately, it's their decision, and whatever way they choose to recruit is the way they choose to recruit."

Lepsch cautioned against seeking simple solutions, as the challenge of attracting healthcare providers involves multiple factors, ranging from insurance to housing. The Social Services Division and Health Council are doing what it can, but this is a multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive approach and sustained efforts.

## *Council motion*

Introducing a motion to accept the Comprehensive Health Plan, Councilor Ryti said that, in his view, two key issues were the need to address malpractice insurance at the statewide level and the local housing shortage for healthcare providers. In addition, while the community is generally healthy, there are significant concerns about the availability and quality of healthcare services, with mental health care being particularly inadequate.

Following unanimous approval of the motion, Chair Derkacs concluded, "This is a good path forward for what the County could do to improve our health services."

## **Wildlife Feeding Ordinance**

Voting 6–1, with Councilor Reagor in opposition, the Council passed a motion directing the County Manager to implement the wildlife education plan recommendations and return to Council with an ordinance prohibiting the feeding of wildlife in the County, with further consideration of how the local enforcement is coordinated with the New Mexico Game and Fish Department.

Council's decision emphasized the negative impact of feeding wildlife on public safety and wildlife health and acknowledged the limitations of current educational efforts in preventing feeding behaviors.

## *Presentation*

At its December 12, 2023, meeting, Council discussed a draft Wildlife Feeding Ordinance and reviewed community feedback [see January 2024 LWVLA *Update*]. At that meeting, Council approved the 2024 Wildlife Education Plan in lieu of an ordinance and requested an update one year following the approval and implementation.

Tonight's presentations by Leslie Bucklin, Assistant Public Information Officer, and Officer Tyler Carter from New Mexico Game and Fish, fulfilled Council's request.

Bucklin's presentation covered the wildlife education plan, public information efforts, LAPD statistics, and conclusions after one year

of implementation. Recognition that wildlife feeding is a multi-jurisdictional concern was evidenced by the attendance of representatives from several other agencies: LAPD and its Animal Control Officers, County Open Space, New Mexico Game and Fish, US Forest Service, National Park Service, and the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Key points about the wildlife education program:

- The educational program began in response to concerns over public feeding of wildlife, as highlighted by Game and Fish Officer Ariel Perraglio and feedback from the community.
- Educational content was widely distributed, including through social media, printed materials (such as articles in utility bill inserts), events, and collaborations with local organizations like PEEC (Pajarito Environmental Education Center) and NM Game and Fish.
- Notable events such as Bear Festival attracted significant participation, with over 1,200 attendees, and helped raise awareness with over 500 educational postcards distributed at the event.
- The LAPD tracked wildlife-related calls, including vehicle accidents involving wildlife.
- Various county departments have worked together to mitigate wildlife conflicts, such as installing bear-proof trash cans and distributing wildlife safety materials like deer whistles. Over 158 bear carts have been successfully exchanged, with a positive difference noted in areas with bear carts and dumpsters.

Bucklin said that the wildlife education plan will continue into 2025, focusing on more targeted messaging, such as addressing feeding of wildlife, and expanding educational programming in collaboration with other agencies. The idea is to maintain ongoing public outreach while introducing new initiatives like potential podcast features with Game and Fish.

In a follow-on presentation, Officer Carter addressed the growing issue of wildlife feeding in Los Alamos communities. He highlighted the importance of community involvement, regulatory enforcement, and the urgent need for a local wildlife feeding ordinance.

Balancing data with personal observations from his local field investigations, Carter highlighted how wildlife feeding has directly impacted public safety and the local environment. He stressed that he had not observed wildlife feeding problems arising from properly hung bird feeders or gardens, and underlined that most feeding incidents have involved attractants that, intentionally or unintentionally, draw wildlife into populated areas.

Wildlife and safety: Carter presented data on wildlife incidents, including confirmed sick animals, mountain lion attacks, bear attacks, and incidents involving coyotes.

He provided several concrete examples of how feeding wildlife has directly jeopardized human safety in Los Alamos, citing a mountain lion attack at Little Forest Preschool, a bear entering a dwelling, and deer becoming aggressive in defense of food sources.

The issue reaches a critical point when wildlife poses an immediate threat to human safety, resulting in euthanized predators, said Carter. There were eight such cases in the past year, he said, that were the direct result of wildlife being attracted to human food sources and entering occupied homes or public areas.

Correlation between feeding and dangerous behavior: Carter provided maps and figures to show how wildlife incidents (vehicle collisions, predator kills, and attacks) cluster around feeding locations. "I chose to look at car accidents, predator kills, things of that nature, because it establishes that this is why it [the feeding] is the nuisance," he said.

Identifying where wildlife feeding has created a nuisance: Carter emphasized that he does not actively go out and look for violators but rather relies on the community to identify problematic feeding.

Response of wildlife feeders to complaints: Currently, Carter knows of 12 active wildlife

feeding locations, with two more under investigation, which have contributed to increased predator activity and heightened human-wildlife conflicts.

Once he establishes that the feeding has created a nuisance, his first visit is an educational talk to discuss public safety incidents in the vicinity of the feeding location. A second visit results in a written warning with a cease-and-desist order to stop feeding. A third time results in a written citation into the County's Magistrate Court.

He said, "Of the 12 locations that I have identified, I have talked to five individuals. Four of them are on their second warning, where, if they continue, they will go to court. And I have one individual who will soon be at the court process."

Carter's approach in educating community members has apparently not been effective at stemming the problem. "From my experience of talking with the public, ... it did not seem to change the behavior of the community members helping propagate this issue," he said. "On several occasions, there were already decisions to willingly take the first few fines with full intent on continuing feeding and to escalate to further criminal acts as well."

Regulation and enforcement challenges: Carter explained the existing State regulation and challenges in enforcing it. The issue arises when enforcement is hampered because LAPD cannot help enforce this specific regulation, and local ordinances fall outside of the purview of Game and Fish. "So, this creates an enforcement gap in some of these issues."

Need for local ordinance: "This behavior has become a public safety issue," said Carter. He pointed out that other regions have successfully addressed similar issues and suggested that Los Alamos County should follow suit. "I am looking for Council support and community support. That way we can move forward on a cooperative creation of a local ordinance allowing Los Alamos County--not only Animal Control, but maybe LAPD--to help me in enforcement so we can cover those gaps that we have," he said.

Concluding his call for action, Carter said, "It is our job as leaders to find a well-managed balance between a healthy wildlife population and a harmonious wildlife coexistence here in Los Alamos County."

### *Public comment*

Community members were divided on whether an ordinance should be implemented. Some emphasized education and alternative solutions, while others stressed the need for enforcement to address the risks posed by wildlife feeding.

Jonathan Dowell emphasized the difficulty of defining the threshold at which the feeding of these animals becomes problematic. He advocated for more education rather than an ordinance, suggesting the need for a careful definition of terms in any legal action.

David Hampton cited potential legal and safety liabilities, drawing a parallel to the installation of a safety net at the golf course. "Recently we put up that net around the driving range of a threat of a golf ball hitting a golfer, right? So, we know that these feeding areas are creating threats to children in our community. And, I mean, I think that's a lot worse."

James Robinson said an ordinance is necessary to complete the three pillars of an effective wildlife program: education, infrastructure, and enforcement. He suggested that local law enforcement should be empowered to address these issues to alleviate the burden on state agencies like Game and Fish.

James Wernicke opposed the ordinance, arguing that it may not be effective in reducing human-wildlife conflicts. He questioned the data supporting the need for such an ordinance and proposed alternative methods, like contraception for deer, as a solution to population control.

### *Council questions and discussion*

Key points made by the councilors included the need for additional enforcement tools, the negative impact of feeding wildlife on public safety and wildlife health, and the inadequacy

of current education efforts to deter feeding. The Council emphasized the importance of balancing public safety, community welfare, and wildlife conservation.

Councilor Cull asked how long it would take for deer to return to normal behavior if feeding stopped. Carter responded, "If we were to stop tomorrow, I don't think we're going to see a change. We may not even see a change this year or in five years. But this has been a long-standing effect that we have seen over 20, 30, 40 years. We did see them come in because of the fire. We started feeding them. We kept feeding them."

Councilor Cull acknowledged the need for the ordinance but expressed concerns about the draft presented. She stressed the importance of carefully wording an ordinance to address raised concerns. Cull supported moving forward with drafting the ordinance for future consideration.

Councilor Lepsch clarified the intent of the motion. "Nobody's taking away anybody's bird feeder. Like, come on, if you're feeding Pop Tarts, this isn't about being kind to nature." He emphasized that an ordinance would provide additional tools to provide for public safety and the welfare of wildlife.

Councilor Havemann supported the motion. "I think this is a perfect example of the role of government in making public policy for the benefit of the entire community and our surrounding ecosystem."

Councilor Reagor explained his reasons for opposing an ordinance. "Well, it looks like they've made a lot of progress, first with the education campaign...and then actually identifying the feeding areas. So far, what, you've given out one citation, yeah, that's all a lot of progress. And so, I don't see why we need to change anything.

Chair Derkacs concluded, "I think the education campaign has been very informative, and I very much pushed for this approach last year when we considered this. But I don't think that there has been a sufficient deterrence in the feeding of wildlife... So, I think I want to see the education campaign continue, but I

also think it's time that the county needs to consider an ordinance going forward."

### *Local news coverage*

Randall Ryti (Dec 23, 2024). Councilor Ryti provides briefing on final meeting of 2024.

<https://ladailypost.com/councilor-ryti-provides-briefing-on-final-meeting-of-2024/>

Kirsten Laskey (Dec 19, 2024). Los Alamos County Council directs staff to draft ordinance prohibiting the feeding of wildlife in town.

<https://ladailypost.com/los-alamos-county-council-directs-staff-to-draft-ordinance-prohibiting-the-feeding-of-wildlife-in-town/>

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

# Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies

## Tickler Report

### Tentative Council Agenda Items as of December 17, 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
  - 1/7/25 meeting. Possible action to approve MOA amendment.
- Current Regional and Intergovernmental Issues
  - 1/7/25 meeting. Quarterly briefing by Intergovernmental Affairs Manager. No action requested.
- 2025 Los Alamos County State Legislative Priorities
  - 1/7/25 meeting. Discussion and possible action.
- Election of Council Chair and Vice Chair
  - 1/7/25 meeting. Action requested..
- Ordinance for a Personal Tax Income Rebate to Eligible Low-Income County Residents health Plan
  - 1/7/25 meeting. Ordinance making available a personal income tax rebate to eligible low-income Los Alamos County property taxpayers for taxable years 2025, 2026, 2027 and 2028. Introduction of ordinance.
- State of the County
  - 1/7/25 meeting. Presentation by County Manager. 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 December 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 December 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
  - 4 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 1
  - No terms ending soon
- 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: 8 vacancies, 13 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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