

# 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  
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President:	Felicia Orth <a href="mailto:orthf(at)yahoo.com">orthf(at)yahoo.com</a>
Newsletter Editor:	Barbara Calef <a href="mailto:bfcalf(at)gmail.com">bfcalf(at)gmail.com</a>
Newsletter Publisher:	Robert Williams <a href="mailto:rawbits2(at)gmail.com">rawbits2(at)gmail.com</a>

## ***Calendar***

June 19	Lunch with a Leader, Unitarian Church, Robert Gibson, noon
June 26	Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon
August 2	Rodeo Parade

## ***Join the Annual Rodeo Parade***

The League of Women Voters will be marching in the Los Alamos County Rodeo Parade on August 2. If you would like to join the group, please contact Ellen Mills ([efmillsnm\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:efmillsnm(at)gmail.com)). We wear white or light- colored clothing in honor of the Suffragist Movement. More details to follow as the date approaches.

## ***June Lunch with a Leader: Robert Gibson***

On June 19, our Lunch with a Leader program will feature Robert Gibson, Chair of the Board of Public Utilities . It will begin at noon and end around 1p.m., but please plan to be there around 11:45 to get settled.

Gibson is a native of the lakes, beaches, and snowbanks of western Michigan. With degrees in physics and electrical engineering from MIT, he joined LANL in 1979 to pursue fusion energy. In retirement, he still works on physics and electronics projects along with classic tech. He is part of the volunteer crew that restored Santa Fe steam locomotive 2926 to operation in Albuquerque. He is presently curating for MIT a permanent exhibit of vacuum tubes from his large collection. He remains an active pilot, hiker, and traveler.

Gibson previously served on the Board of Public Utilities twenty years ago, between terms on County Council. He has also served on several other public boards and committees and as a bill analyst at the NM State Legislature.

The lecture will be about Los Alamos County's goal to be carbon-neutral by mid-century, which will require phasing out natural gas and carbon-based electricity. This talk will outline the challenges and how citizens and the County can meet them together.



*Robert Gibson, Chair of the Board of Public Utilities. Stock DPU photo.*

*Karyl Ann Armbruster*

## ***President's Message:*** League Runs in the Family

My godmother passed in early May, and I traveled to Santa Clarita, California, to assist in clearing out her condominium. Mary Anne Helen Delbruegge Deuschle was an especially attentive, vivacious, loving godmother to me and my four sisters. Organizing her personal items for the family, and for donation to local non-profits, I discovered she had been active in the League of Women Voters before I was old enough to understand what that meant.

In St. Louis in the 1960s and in Marshalltown, Iowa, in the 1970s, she had helped register voters and served as a poll worker. Among the items I found she had saved was a memorial coin of Herbert Hoover, an "I Like Ike" button, a Carter button, Obama magnets, small stuffed bears dressed as Uncle Sam, and a substantial amount of July 4th tableware and decorations. Mary Anne and my mother met in middle school, both of them the children of German immigrants moving away from persistent conflicts with France, happy to settle along with many other German families in north St. Louis in the late 1800s.

As I held a few scarves she had carefully wrapped for keeping, including a scarf "made in Italy" showing the signatures of all US presidents from 1776-1976 (see photo), I remembered the song she taught to 4-year-olds naming every president in order, and reflected on why we keep such memorabilia long after it's relevant. Contemporary political merchandise no longer serves as the only way to convey a candidate's image, or message, as it did in colonial times. Most of it is without monetary value (unless you actually have something from colonial times). It can serve as a reminder of political engagement or an item of nostalgic charm. In Mary Anne's case, she was focused on its educational value, tangible things to share with preschoolers as she taught them the presidents' names, the alphabet, state capitals, and the importance of voting.

She was proud of my engagement with the League, and I now have a better understanding of the depth of her own reverence for the American democratic process.



*Scarves . Photo by Felicia Orth.*

*Felicia Orth*

## **Observer Corps Report – County Council – May 6**

### *Distracted Driving, Wildland-Urban Interface Code, Fuel Reduction on Steep Slopes, Updated Utility Rate Schedules*

The regular session was attended by Chair Theresa Cull, Councilors Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, Ryn Herrmann, Beverly Neal-Clinton, David Reagor, and Randall Ryti.

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 the artificial intelligence software otter.ai.

### **Ordinance on Distracted Driving**

Voting unanimously, Council approved an amended ordinance relating to the use of handheld mobile communication devices while driving. (38-315 of the Municode)

This ordinance was first introduced at the March 18, 2025, Council meeting. The purpose is to promote awareness of the risks associated with use of cell phones while driving. Texting was already prohibited (except in an emergency). The revised ordinance added further prohibitions involving the use of a handheld mobile device. However, staff recognized that an amendment was needed to specify an exemption for a radio microphone used to communicate via a vehicle mounted radio. Such devices are installed in police cars, construction vehicles, and buses. Council voted to add this amendment on April 8, 2025.

### **-Adoption of Parts of the Wildland-Urban Interface Code**

Council unanimously approved an ordinance amending the County's Building and Fire Codes to incorporate three chapters of the 2021 International Wildland Urban Interface

(WUI) Code, which is the industry standard for WUI.

### *Details of the Proposed Ordinance*

The ordinance aims to mitigate fire risks by enhancing building construction and fire safety standards and managing the surrounding environment to reduce fuel for potential wildland fires. "While we cannot eliminate the possibility of a catastrophic event, our focus is on minimizing potential damage through proactive fire prevention building codes and mitigation strategies," said Fire Marshal Colorado Cordova.

County's Housing and Special Projects Manager, Dan Osborn, highlighted the importance of using class A fire-rated assemblies and the benefits for insurance and community safety. "It also helps us with the insurance when we can demonstrate that the homes in our community and the businesses have been built to this higher and appropriate standard," he said.

Deputy County Manager Juan Rael emphasized that "this WUI ordinance is not meant to be punitive and will only be applied when major improvements come in as a building permit. And this will not be retroactive."

### *Discussion on Firewise Communities and Neighborhood Involvement*

Councilor Ryti inquired about the requirements for Los Alamos County to become a firewise community and the involvement of neighborhoods. "When we talk about firewise, we talk about fire-adapted communities," replied Fire Chief Sterna. "It really takes neighborhood involvement, and it really takes the responsibility away from the Fire Department. It's all about people taking ownership of their neighborhoods."

The Fire Department's home assessment program was highlighted as a successful initiative that encourages homeowners to engage their neighbors.

Chief Serna added, "Our neighborhoods are only as well mitigated as the least mitigated

home in it. And to that end, I think homeowners are taking that responsibility onto themselves, engaging their neighbors, having educational conversations, and getting us back out there on a neighborhood level, to where we're doing multiple homes in a neighborhood. I think that sense of community is reestablishing itself with wildfire mitigation."

## Fuel Reduction on Steep Slopes

As part of its Consent Agenda, Council unanimously approved a seven-year contract with BurnBot, Inc. to reduce fire fuel on steep terrain on County-owned properties,

## Updated Utility Rate Schedules

Two draft ordinances relating to electric and wastewater utility rates were introduced.

- An ordinance to raise electric rates by 9% in FY2026 and 8% in FY2027. If approved, the new rates would take effect on July 1, 2025, and July 1, 2026.
- An ordinance to raise sewage service rates by 7% for FY2026 and an additional 7% in FY2027.

A public hearing on these ordinances is scheduled for June 10.

On a related topic, the staff report noted that the Board of Public Utilities and staff have held a series of public meetings discussing residential time of use and residential demand rate designs. The Board directed staff to implement both time of use and residential demand billing capabilities in the billing software program.

### *Local news coverage*

*Randall Ryti, Los Alamos Daily Post, March 28, 2025*

<https://ladailypost.com/video-councilor-ryti-shares-highlights-of-march-25-meeting/>

Ryan Lowery, BoomGov – Council Agenda, May 6, 2025 [Substack Blog post]

<https://www.boomtownlosalamos.org/p/boomgov-council-agenda-5-6-25>

Alaina Mencinger, Santa Fe New Mexican, May 7, 2025

[https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local\\_news/los-alamos-county-stiffens-ordinance-to-curb-cellphone-use-while-driving/article\\_eedb1426-c322-4e65-8fcd-ac487cefe04f.html](https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/los-alamos-county-stiffens-ordinance-to-curb-cellphone-use-while-driving/article_eedb1426-c322-4e65-8fcd-ac487cefe04f.html)

Ryn Herrmann, The Daily Post, May 12, 2025. Video:

<https://ladailypost.com/los-alamos-county-councilor-ryn-herrmann-shares-highlights-of-may-6-council-meeting/>

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## Observer Corps Report – County Council – May 13

### *2025 Legislative Session, Local/Small Business Engagement Working Group*

The work session was attended by Councilors Chair Theresa Cull, Suzie Havemann, Melanee Hand, Ryn Herrmann, David Reagor, and Randall Ryti. Councilor Beverly Neal-Clinton was absent.

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 the artificial intelligence software otter.ai.

## 2025 Legislative Session

State Representative Christine Chandler provided a wide-ranging overview of the 2025 legislative session, focusing on bills that she championed and commenting on reasons that some failed to pass. She also discussed the potential impacts of federal budget cuts on state programs, issues likely to be raised at the

next legislative session, and advice for how citizens can effectively advocate for bills.

### *Paid Family Medical Leave Legislation*

Chandler described the successful journey of the Paid Family Medical Leave bill through the House, including changes to address business concerns, such as shortening the leave duration and lowering premiums. The bill also included a stipend for families with a new child.

However, despite these changes, the bill stalled in the Senate Finance Committee. Chandler expressed frustration with the lack of clear explanations from those who voted against it.

### *Impact of Federal Budget Cuts on State Programs*

Chandler noted that "The budget right now is probably on your minds with all the activities that are going on in Washington and the many, many cuts to federal programs that have the potential for seriously impacting and frankly injuring people across the state, across the country."

She discussed the potential impact of federal budget cuts on state programs, including Medicaid, which affects approximately 50% of the state's population. She added, "I think we all need to be worried about Social Security, Medicare and other programs as well."

Chandler emphasized the need for state legislators to work together to soften the blow of federal cuts and protect state programs. On a positive note, she said that the budget chair feels the state has enough cushion in its budget to be able to sustain some amount of retraction. "We have a 30% reserve," said Chandler, "and we have been creating over the last 6, 7, 8 years, various funds upon which we can rely if there are shortfalls."

### *Legislative Reforms*

Chandler discussed the potential for a constitutional amendment to extend legislative sessions. Councilor Ryti noted that longer sessions made quite a lot of sense. "So that

way, the executive doesn't control the agenda, and then you have a little more time to actually make progress on things."

Acknowledging the benefits of longer sessions, Chandler noted that, "We live in a very complex world now. We need more time to study issues and work on issues." She added that "the sticking point might be that there's this question about paying the legislature, and we need a constitutional amendment to do that as well."

### *Legislation on Public Records*

Councilor Ryti inquired about the future of legislation related to public records, specifically the Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA), which did not pass during the 2025 session.

IPRA bills are really hard, said Chandler. "We've lost sight of what IPRA's supposed to do, which is to serve the public, really, primarily, and the press," she said. "IPRA was intended so that citizens can have access to information, monitor what all of us are doing."

Chandler emphasized that the proposed bill was not an attempt to block the press but rather to address the excessive demands of commercial requesters such as LexisNexis. "LexisNexis is an electronic news service and also provides legal cases. It's a subscription. And our local governments are just bogged down," she explained. "People like LexisNexis just scrape all public records, and then put them into their systems and profit from it."

One of the IPRA bills would have created an arbitration process to handle administrative issues instead of going to court. However, "it was like an onslaught immediately, in terms of opposition," said Chandler. She said she would meet with the Municipal League to discuss strategy.

### *Effective—and Ineffective—Citizen Input*

Councilor Havemann asked Chandler about the volume of citizen input she receives, where most of the input comes from, and what issues are most frequently raised.

Chandler answered that she gets a fair amount of public input but often not from her constituents. Most input comes from organized

public interest groups such as the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos and Sierra Club, she said. Citizens from the metro areas, but almost none of her constituents, expressed concern about public safety. Chandler said she also received input about medical compacts and medical malpractice as well as the red flag bill, the extreme risk order protection bill that allows guns to be retrieved from someone who might be a threat to that person or others.

Chandler said she gets a fair amount of electronically generated comments, "and I can tell you they're very ineffective... So, word to the wise, it's better to have a real personal note that actually shows you spent [at least] a nanosecond thinking about what you're talking to me about, especially if you expect a response."

### *Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Privacy Concerns*

Councilor Havemann inquired about Chandler's priorities for 2026.

Chandler answered without hesitation, "AI. And I'm scared. Truthfully, people need to be scared. It's a privacy thing. Every time you click on something on your computer, information is being scraped about you. She emphasized the importance of protecting data and regulating AI use and noting the challenges of regulating big tech companies... Big tech companies are very opposed to bills that will regulate how they use information that they just grab. ... They fight it tooth and nail."

Chandler mentioned a bill she sponsored to address algorithmic discrimination, which faced strong opposition from the tech lobby. "Employers use AI to screen you sometimes," she said. "So, you know, you put in your application and, before a human eye ever looks at your application, you're out of the running, potentially. Because the AI has decided. It's predictive. ... And how do you know the underlying information that screens you out is not discriminatory or right?"

However, the proposed bill was fought very strongly by the tech lobbyists. Although the bill made it through two committees, it never

made it to the floor. "It's rough taking on big companies" said Chandler.

### *Anti-Donation Clause and Essential Services Legislation*

Councilor Cull asked about the status of anti-donation legislation. Chandler explained that the legislation stalled due to broad and impractical approaches. She felt the bill was overly focused on non-profit entities. "It got derailed, partly because some of the approaches were not well thought out," she said.

Chandler felt that anti-donation bills needed to be more flexible and acknowledge that there are private entities that do public work. "But you don't want it to be so broad that it can be abused, and that's what some of the people who oppose it ... often focus on the corruption thing," she said.

On a more positive note, Chandler cited the success of a bill she co-sponsored, Senate Bill 357, Essential Services Development Act. Signed into law by the Governor on April 8, this bill provides a mechanism to support essential public services by private entities. One example is utility-type services, for instance, to pay for sewer hookups on private property.

### **Local/Small Business Engagement Working Group**

Council's Small Business Working Group discussed strategies to improve local properties, including engaging property owners and exploring security mechanisms. Councilors Hermann, Reagor, and Ryti are members of the Working Group.

In his report, Councilor Ryti highlighted the group's meetings with the Local Business Coalition, County staff, and other interested parties. Discussions have focused on a wide range of issues of concern to local retail businesses, such as rules and interpretation of building codes and how to better promote local businesses. Examples included facilitating wayfinding to businesses and providing promotional information on buses and at bus stops.

## *Small Business LEDA Program Proposal*

Councilor Reagor presented his ideas on a streamlined approach by which the County could administer the Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) program to address vacant or underutilized properties in the County.

LEDA allows public support of economic development to foster, promote, and enhance local economic development efforts.

The mission of LEDA is very broad, so the group is proposing a narrow program aimed at small businesses located in properties that are below current code requirements but still desirable as a business location. The goal is to convert these vacant or underutilized properties into vibrant businesses. Councilor Ryti noted that the vacancy rate for retail or restaurant properties was about 15-20% in 2024, according to data collected by the County Assessor's Office.

### *Financial Structure and Proposed Requirements*

LEDA allows the County to provide grants and zero interest loans to qualified businesses. The owner is required to obtain private capital, or an in-kind contribution, to match the grant component. The security component of the LEDA agreement is provided by a third-party nonprofit.

In his draft white paper, Councilor Reagor suggested that, to qualify for a grant or loan through the County's retail LEDA program, the proposal must satisfy the following requirements:

- The business must be consistent with Los Alamos County's long-term plans;
- The business fills a segment in the retail gap analysis;
- The applicant has the capacity to undertake, complete, and sustain the proposed project; and
- 50% or more of the business is owned by a county resident.

## *Proposal Scoring*

Proposals that meet the requirements will be scored on the following mandatory evaluation criteria, which are in the LEDA law, said Councilor Reagor:

- Amount of local taxes, utilities, and fees to be generated for the community;
- Amount of private capital committed to the project;
- Number of jobs created by the proposal; and
- Extent to which the proposed project contributes to the County's adopted plans.

### *Process for Small Business LEDA*

Addressing the shortfalls of the County's current LEDA process, Councilor Reagor said, "What we've seen before is people just get trapped in loops and they never go anywhere. His proposal aims "to get all the objections, all the problems with code and so forth on the table at the beginning so they can get a real budget, and then other things don't pop up later on."

### *What's Next?*

The Working Group plans to refine the program with community input and staff collaboration.

Alan Saenz, co-owner of SALA Event Center and member of the Local Business Coalition, expressed appreciation for Councilor Reagor's initiative on the retail LEDA program.

Councilor Cull told the Working Group members that she appreciated their work and looked forward to their next report.

### *Local news coverage*

Ryn Herrmann, The Daily Post, May 18, 2025.. Video:

<https://ladailypost.com/video-los-alamos-county-councilor-ryn-herrmann-shares-highlights-from-may-13-work-session/>

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## **Observer Corps Report – Planning & Zoning Commission – May 14 and May 28**

None of the agenda items were relevant to Los Alamos League positions.

## **Observer Corps Report – County Council – May 20**

### *Community Broadband Network, Purchase of Longview Drive Property in White Rock, Lightning Warning System*

The regular session was attended by Chair Theresa Cull, Councilors Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, Ryn Herrmann, Beverly Neal-Clinton, David Reagor, and Randall Rytli.

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 the artificial intelligence software otter.ai.

### **Community Broadband Network Update**

The County's Broadband Manager, Jerry Smith, updated Council on the progress and timeline of the community broadband network (CBN) project. The project, approved by Council at its meeting on November 19, 2024, is in its high-level engineering design phase. The project's tentative timeline calls for low-level design approval in March-April 2026 and construction starting in June 2026.

### *Project Budget and Design*

Smith reported that the CBN project is on schedule and on budget. The total budget of \$35 million includes a \$5.6 million contingency fund.

Smith defined the high-level design process—which he said is mostly completed—as including data gathering, base maps, network architecture, and resiliency design. The data were used to identify optimal routes, fiber capacity, and connection points based on cost, scalability, and geographic constraints. He said that the low-level design process—which is about to start—will create permissible and construction-ready print packages.

### *Cost Savings Strategy—Making Use of Existing Assets*

For the underground portions of the network, the project uses a traditional conduit method, with fiber cables installed inside the conduits. Smith said that one immediate saving to the CBN project is that existing empty conduits in North Community and Western Area neighborhoods can be used for the fiber-optic cable. Providing context, Smith said that conduit was installed as part of the Burned Area Recovery (BAR) Project nearly 25 years ago. The County's CBN vendor, Bonfire, worked with a contractor in March 2025 to use a compressor to put air through the unused conduit and found that 90% of it is still intact and usable.

A second cost-saving strategy is to attach fiber to existing utility poles instead of installing it in new underground conduits, Smith said. Using poles is not only less expensive, but also eliminates the risk of encountering shallow bedrock, which is by far the greatest project cost risk.

Councilor Havemann asked whether attaching the fiber to poles would lessen the quality, integrity, and reliability of the project. Smith replied that, "If money was no object, you would bury it. But we're taking advantage of the assets that we have, and basically 50% of the project is ending up using aerial methods." Rael added the caveat that the project still needed approval from the

Department of Public Utilities (DPU) to use the 1300 poles in the design. "DPU hasn't given us a thumbs up, because we're not at that stage yet," he said.

Councilor Havemann raised the concern that a high wind event or a fire could take out a pole, leading not only to a loss of power, but also loss of internet connectivity for customers connected to that line, whereas it would not be a problem if the line were underground.

Rael acknowledged that this was also an item of concern to the County, but noted that undergrounding the whole CBN system "would move our \$35M project to like a \$50M project. And so that's why we're trying to balance delivering a project and staying within a budget that we feel we can get it built for. ... More money would eliminate the risk, but we're trying to balance delivering with what we have already proposed with the \$35M."

### *Risk Management Strategies*

Smith addressed Council's concerns about the potential for the project to go over budget. Encountering shallow bedrock during installation of underground conduit is the biggest cost risk, he said. "Everything else that would be considered is pretty minor compared to this big one."

Using existing assets to the extent possible, such as aerial and existing conduit, is the primary risk-management strategy, said Smith. However, he described another strategy, which is a construction method called micro-trenching. For major lines, a backhoe is used to excavate a trench to three or more feet in depth. In contrast, the chance of encountering rock is considerably lessened using micro-trenching, in which the machinery cuts a small, narrow trench, one to two inches wide and less than two feet deep. Micro-trenching would only be used on neighborhood streets.

### *Network Resiliency*

Smith emphasized the redundancies being built into the network design, ensuring that multiple lines will provide backup connectivity in case of failures. Local microfiber access nodes, called hubs, will be installed in downtown Los Alamos, the Golf Course, and

White Rock. Multiple lines will connect each hub to each of two high-capacity routers in White Rock, which in turn connect White Rock to routers in Albuquerque. If a fiber line going to one of the routers fails, Smith said, then the other router will pick up automatically to take the traffic.

Additional redundancy will be provided by having two separate internet feeds connecting the routers in Albuquerque and White Rock, he added.

### *"Middle Mile" Update*

Smith updated Council on the status of the "Middle Mile," the 11-mile project that San Ildefonso Pueblo has been working on, which will provide Los Alamos with a second fiber-optic line up the Hill.

- Section 1 of the project was completed with installation of the conduits during the water line replacement project along State Road 4 between White Rock and the intersection with the Main Hill Road.
- Section 2, which is currently under construction, continues installation east from that intersection to the bridge across the Rio Grande.
- Section 3 is from the Rio Grande bridge, east to the boundary with Pojoaque. It is still in the permitting phase, which is a bit complicated due to construction of the Pojoaque Basin Regional Water System.

### *Bond Issuance*

Melissa Dadzie, the County's Chief Financial Officer, reviewed the CBN funding plan with Council. Council adopted a \$35 million CIP budget for broadband, and the County plans to issue GRT Revenue bonds to fund the project. Dadzie said that the bond issuance is planned for October 2025 to avoid potential loss of the tax exemption status for municipal bonds after January 2026.

### **Purchase of Longview Property**

Council discussed the proposed purchase of three properties at 112, 124, and 126 Longview Drive in White Rock for \$927K. The purpose of the acquisition, said County

Manager Anne Laurent, is to realign Longview Drive, enhance White Rock's downtown area, and facilitate redevelopment consistent with the 2021 White Rock Town Center Master Plan.

The County staff report pointed out that the plan to straighten Longview Drive has been contemplated for decades. It noted that the Master Plan supported the road realignment "for the purpose of creating a multi-modal street that serves as a 'complete street' including widened sidewalks, streetscape amenities such as seating, landscaping, lighting, signage, shade, and bike racks, and public parking to create an activated 'main street' feel."

The multi-million-dollar project would be funded through monies set aside for White Rock Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) and other economic development funds.

The timeline proposed by County Manager Anne Laurent includes a vote by Council at its June 10 meeting, followed by scheduling a closing, with design and construction possibly starting in 2026.

## Lightning Warning System

Council heard from Cory Styron, Director of the Community Services Department, about a new lightning safety system installed at some public gathering locations in the County.

The system includes two weather stations which provide real-time weather updates at Overlook and North Mesa Parks. Warning substations are installed at Ashley Pond, the golf course, and the White Rock splash pad.

In the event of lightning, the stations will emit a blast warning to announce the presence of a lightning cell nearby, and caution people to seek shelter. Once the danger has passed, "typically, about 30 minutes," said Styron, "we get an all-clear signal and we can reconvene."

The system aims to enhance public safety, especially during summer concerts, by providing a more reliable and centralized warning system. Styron assured the Council that the warning system will only be operational when crowds are present. "So, you're not going to hear one of these at three o'clock in

the morning, unless you guys decide to tell us that."

## County Documents

Los Alamos County, Community Broadband Network project page  
<https://www.losalamosnm.us/Initiatives/Community-Broadband-Network>

Los Alamos County, White Rock Town Center Master Plan (October 2021)  
<https://www.losalamosnm.us/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/departments/community-development/documents/white-rock-town-center-master-plan-202110.pdf>

### *Local news coverage*

Ryan Lowery, BoomGov – Council agenda 5-20-25, May 20, 2025 [Substack Blog post]  
<https://www.boomtownlosalamos.org/p/boomgov-council-agenda-5-20-25>

Citizenportal.ai, Los Alamos Council reviews \$35M broadband network design plan with Bonfire team, May 20, 2025  
<https://citizenportal.ai/articles/3424575/New-Mexico/>

Citizenportal.ai, Los Alamos installs lightning warning systems to enhance public safety during events, May 20, 2025  
<https://citizenportal.ai/articles/3424579/New-Mexico/>

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## ***May Lunch with a Leader: Kristina Fisher***

Kristina Fisher is the associate director of Think New Mexico (TNM), a 26-year-old nonpartisan think tank that develops public policy reforms and advocates for them in the legislature. The organization has a long list of successful initiatives, including repealing the tax on food and putting an end to predatory lending.

TNM's latest mission seeks to address the state's serious shortage of health care workers. The problem is a national one, but only New Mexico has actually experienced a net loss of physicians between 2019 and 2024. Fisher explained that TNM has ten "big" recommendations, but chose to focus on the four "most impactful" during the 2025 legislative session:



*Karyl Ann Armbruster (chair of Lunch with a Leader) greets our May speaker, Kristina Fisher from Think New Mexico. Photo by Leslie Wallstrom*

1. Create a permanent fund for Medicaid. The Medicaid Trust Fund was the one success this year, Fisher said. Forty-two percent of New Mexicans are on Medicaid, the highest percentage of any state. Fisher explained that Medicaid reimbursement often pays less to the physician than the cost of providing care. The bill to create the fund passed in the House and Senate and was signed into law by the governor. The two revenue sources for the permanent fund will be surplus oil and gas taxes and a portion of the annual funds that revert to the General Fund, with a goal of \$2 billion, which will generate \$100 million a year to increase reimbursement rates for health care providers.
2. Make tax policy friendlier to health care workers. The gross receipts tax (GRT) on medical services cannot be passed on to insurance companies, Medicare, or Medicaid, but must be paid by the provider. That makes it more expensive to practice in NM than elsewhere. It exceeds 8% in many communities. Previously, the legislature had chipped away at the tax, but Senator Steinborn and Representative Hochman-Vigil co-sponsored a bill to repeal the GRT on medical services entirely. The House and Senate passed the legislation, but the governor vetoed it because it lacked a funding source to pay for the tax reductions.

TNM recommended two other tax reform bills during the session, neither of which passed. One would have expanded the tax credit for rural practitioners to include EMTs, paramedics, occupational therapists, audiologists, speech and language pathologists, and licensed practical nurses, among others.

The purpose of other bill was to create a tax credit for preceptors. Preceptors are community educators--Fisher called them "largely unpaid shadow doctors"--who provide advice for incoming health care providers, such as during medical residencies.

3. The “stickiest, most controversial of TNM’s proposals” was medical malpractice reform. Fisher said there is an unbalanced situation in the state between trial lawyers and doctors. She noted that New Mexico has the second highest rate of malpractice cases in the country. There is no limit to punitive damages, and the standard of proof to receive punitive damages is very low. There are record verdicts for punitive damages. As a result, doctors' premiums are very high, twice as expensive as in surrounding states, leading doctors to retire early or leave the state.

TNM proposed six reforms, three of which they pursued this year with SB 176:

- Cap attorneys' fees as is done in twenty other states.
  - SB 176 would have capped the fee at 25% if a case is settled, and 33% if a case goes to trial.
- End lump-sum payouts from the Patient Compensation Fund.
  - With a public patient compensation fund, future medical costs are paid as they are incurred.
  - Attorneys prefer a lump sum payout, but the patient's portion must last for their lifetime.
- Send 75% of any punitive damages award to a new fund to improve patient safety.
  - Fisher said punitive damages should be awarded only for egregious conduct.
  - The majority of the award should go to where it will deter such conduct.

SB176 was not heard until Day 53. However, it had 24 bipartisan co-sponsors on the bill and lots of public attention. After the session, the Governor spoke in favor of medical malpractice reform.

4. Join the nine major interstate compacts for health care workers (physicians, physician assistants, psychologists, counselors, dentists and dental hygienists, emergency medical personnel, audiologists and speech therapists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists). The compacts are agreements among states to accept professional licenses issued by the other states just as driver's licenses from out of state are legal:
- Each compact has an interstate commission.
  - Most states have joined the compacts.
  - Currently the only health care worker compact joined by NM is for nurses.
  - Other health care workers must be licensed in the state to practice, even to provide telehealth.
  - The biggest block in the legislature is the Senate Judiciary Committee, which is dominated by trial lawyers.
  - TNM believes compacts would make a difference overnight.

Looking ahead, Fisher said TNM will return with the tax reforms during the next session; they are fiscal bills that do not need a message from the governor. TNM is urging the governor to take up the compacts and medical malpractice reforms, either in a special session or in the 2026 short session. They also recommend increasing the student loan repayment program and increasing the salary for teachers.

*Barbara Calef*

# ***League of Women Voters, Los Alamos Annual Meeting***

## **Minutes**

**Thursday, April 17, 2025  
Fellowship Hall of the Unitarian Church  
1738 North Sage Loop  
Los Alamos, New Mexico**

### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 1:12 P.M. with 31 members in attendance. The quorum of 19 was met to proceed with the meeting. The meeting was chaired by Felicia Orth, President of the Los Alamos League.

### **Minutes of the 2024 Meeting (published in the May 2024 *Update*)**

The minutes of the 2024 Annual Meeting were recorded by Ellen Mills, Secretary . The readers for the 2024 Annual Meeting minutes were Maire O'Neill and Barbara Calef. Rebecca Shankland moved to approve the 2024 minutes as presented, and Barbara Calef seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### **President's Report**

Felicia Orth stated the League's mission of being a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government and influencing public policy through education and advocacy. Last year's activities, such as the Candidates Forum, publication of the *Voter Guide*, *Legislative Preview* and Lunch with a Leader fully aligned with the mission . Felicia recognized June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin, members of the Observer Corps, for their contribution to the *Update* that ensures transparency of the local government.

The payment of membership dues must now be made through ChapterSpot, an online portal managed by the National League. A few hiccups are being worked through. Although donations to the local League can also be made through ChapterSpot, our League prefers that they be made directly to the Los Alamos League, preferably by check.

Last year, the Los Alamos League increased its visibility with young people by participating in events with the Girl Scouts and with the Los Alamos High School. The National League also took steps to develop a position on the federal judiciary. Our League participated by holding a consensus meeting.

Felicia thanked outgoing Board member Ellen Mills and welcomed incoming Board members Cecile Hemez, Leslie Wallstrom and June Fabryka-Martin.

Felicia thanked the Delle Foundation for its support.

The State and National Leagues are currently participating in several lawsuits to protect democracy . Information can be found on their respective websites. The *Los Alamos Reporter* and *Los Alamos Daily Post* have posted press releases issued by the Los Alamos League regarding those actions.

Felicia expressed her pride to be a member of the League and to be a lawyer. She reminded the audience of the power of personal connections.

## Membership Report

Robert (Bob) Williams reported that the Los Alamos League had 130 members as of April 15, 2025. To help with data collection for the local membership database, Bob asks members who join or renew to forward to him the confirmation email they receive. A Friendly Reminder will be sent to the membership to that effect.

Most memberships will expire on April 30, 2025 . Members should expect a reminder email to renew.

## Treasurer's Report

Adelaide Jacobson reports that the Los Alamos League is in good financial standing with \$7,000 in its checking account, \$10,000 in its savings account, and \$50,000 in two certificates of deposit.

Of the \$75 paid in dues to the National League, \$13.61 go to the local League. Members are strongly encouraged to pay their dues using ChapterSpot, rather than by writing a check. In case a check is used, it must be made out to LWV-US.

To make it easier to track the costs of functions and events, this year the Budget Committee aggregated all expenses associated with each function/event. In prior budgets, expenses were aggregated by type.

## Adoption of Local Program (positions, study, plans for action)

Barbara Calef mentioned the many difficulties and headaches associated with the switch to ChapterSpot, and the lack of responsiveness to some of her questions to the support desk. The local online form to indicate volunteering interests is still not working properly. Ed Santiago encourages members to exert pressure to get those issues resolved by addressing complaints to the National League. A Friendly Reminder will include the email address to use.

Barbara listed the local programs and asked for comments and suggestions. On the Indigent Health Care Fund, Leslie Wallstrom asked for a clarification on the wording of the County's Health Care Assistance Program funds. Lisa Hampton confirmed that the wording of the position is accurate. No other comments were made.

Charlie Sartor made the motion to approve all the LWV-LA programs as presented . Jody Benson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

June Fabryka-Martin made the motion to accept all the LWV-LA positions as presented . Ann LePage seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## Consideration of Bylaws Amendments

This year's Bylaws Amendments are needed to align with changes related to types of memberships and to dues collection made by the National League. The amendments are not optional. The two amendments were presented for information.

Amendments were made to:

- ARTICLE III, Section 2. Types of Membership
- ARTICLE VI, Section 2. Dues

## Adoption of the FY 2025-26 Budget

June Fabryka-Martin inquired about the \$90 PayPal expense, representing the aggregated fees charged for each payment to the local League . She wondered whether our FY2025-26 budget needs to continue including PayPal transaction fees, now that membership fees are being paid via ChapterSpot to the National League for distribution to local Leagues.

Lisa Hampton moved to accept the FY 2025-26 Budget as presented . June Fabryka-Martin seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## **Election of Officers and Directors**

The Slate of Officers and Directors for 2025-2026 was presented by Rebecca Shankland, representing the Nominating Committee composed of Rebecca Shankland, Ed Santiago, and Leslie Wallstrom.

- Officers:
  - President: Felicia Orth
  - 1st Vice-President/President Elect: Leslie Wallstrom
  - 2nd Vice-President: June Fabryka-Martin
  - Past President/Newsletter Editor: Barbara Calef
  - Secretary: Cecile Hemez
  - Treasurer: Adelaide Jacobson
- Directors:
  - Lunch with a Leader: Karyl Ann Armbruster
  - Membership: Robert Williams
  - Publicity: Jody Benson
  - Voter Services/Voter Guides: Lynn Jones
  - Community Health and Wellbeing: Lisa Hampton
  - Reservations and Refreshments: Wendy Swanson
  - Director at Large (Technology): Akkana Peck
  - Director at Large (Communications): Rebecca Shankland
- Off-Board Directors (vote by membership not required except for Nominating Committee):
  - Website/Social Media: Helena Whyte, Madhavi Garimella
  - Observer Corps: June Fabryka-Martin, Craig Martin, Maire O'Neill
  - Fundraising: Ellen Mills
  - Video: Ed Santiago, Robert Williams
  - Newsletter: Barbara Calef, Robert Williams, Rebecca Shankland
  - Nominating Committee: Ellen Mills

There were no nominations from the floor. Ann LePage moved to accept the proposed Slate of Officers and Directors. Adelaide Jacobson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:55 P.M.

*Minutes by Cecile Hemez*

*Reviewed by June Fabryka-Martin and Barbara Calef*

*Approved on May 22, 2025*

# Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies

## Tickler Report Tentative Council Agenda Items as of May 28, 2025

A partial list of tentative Council agenda items from the County tickler distributed on the above date. All items are subject to change.

- Proposed Electric Rate Schedules, Electric Customer Service Charges and Electric Energy Charges
  - 6/10/25 meeting. Public hearing. Action requested.
- Proposed Sewage Service Rates
  - 6/10/25 meeting. Public hearing. Action requested.
- MainStreet Program
  - 6/10/25 meeting. Presentation. No action requested.
- Purchase of Properties on Longview Avenue
  - 06/17/25. Briefing. Action requested.
- Council Strategic Goal: Economic Vitality 5/06/25 meeting.
  - 06/17/25. Briefing. Action requested.
- Council's Local/Small Business Engagement Working Group
  - 06/17/25. Briefing. No action requested.
- Quarterly Economic Development Update
  - 06/17/25. Briefing. No action requested.
- Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan Priorities
  - 06/17/25. Briefing. No action requested.
- Inclusivity Task Force Interim Report
  - 06/24/25 meeting. Briefing. No action requested.
- 

### eComment Tool for Council meetings:

You can submit comments at:  
<https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>.  
Find the meeting and select "eComment" in the far-right column. Items open for public comment are marked with a "Comment" tag.  
See details at:  
<https://ladailypost.com/county-launches-ecomment-tool-for-council-meetings/>

## County BCC Vacancies as of May 31, 2025

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 the above date.

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

• Art in Public Places Board	0
○ No terms ending soon	
• Board of Public Utilities	0
○ No terms ending soon	
• County Health Council	5
○ No terms ending soon	
• Environmental Sustainability Board	1
○ 3 terms ending July 31, 2025	
• Historic Preservation Advisory Board	0
○ No terms ending soon	
• Library Board	0
○ 2 terms ending August 31, 2025	
• Lodgers' Tax Advisory Board	0
○ No terms ending soon	
• Parks and Recreation Board	0
○ No terms ending soon	
• Personnel Board	1
○ No terms ending soon	
• Planning and Zoning Commission	0
○ No terms ending soon	
• Transportation Board	0
○ No terms ending soon	

Totals: 7 vacancies, 5 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> .



Mail to: LWV Los Alamos / P.O. Box 158 / Los Alamos, NM 87544  
(Each individual must complete a separate application.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Partner\*: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone 1: \_\_\_\_\_ (cellular phone) Phone 2: \_\_\_\_\_ (other phone)  
E-mail (required): \_\_\_\_\_

**Dues:** The recommended dues amount is \$75, but members can pay any amount from \$20 up. **All checks for membership dues should be payable to LWVUS.** 20% of dues will go to LWVLA, 47% will go to LWVNM, and 33% will go to LWVUS. (Only the 20% for LWVLA is tax-deductible. A tax-deduction statement will be supplied on request.)

**Newsletter:** How do you want to receive the *Update* newsletter:  
\_\_\_\_\_ email it as a PDF file \_\_\_\_\_ mail a hard copy \_\_\_\_\_ no newsletter  
\_\_\_\_\_ 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)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Advocate for League positions: communicate with local, state, and federal leaders.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Serve on the LWV-Los Alamos Board
- \_\_\_\_\_ Observer Corps: Watch Council, DPU, P&Z meetings etc. and write a summary to publish in our newsletter. (All meetings are recorded, so you can watch them later.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fundraising – Assist in raising money for LWVLA.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Voter Guide – Assist in developing the Guide – edit, develop questions, work with news publications, etc
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lunch with a Leader – order/deliver lunches when we meet in person; help set up tables.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Newsletter – Write newsletter articles on a local issue or League activity for the *Update*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Organize/provide refreshments for forums and other in-person meetings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Publicity – Submit press releases to local media.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Voter registration – Register voters at events such as the Farmers Market (with training by the County Clerk's office).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Website / Social Media – Provide technical assistance and develop content.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Another area (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

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