

LWW LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®] OF LOS ALAMOS

UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos
P.O. Box 158, Los Alamos, NM 87544

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

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Calendar

August 21 Lunch with a Leader, Unitarian Church, Judge Catherine Taylor, 11:45
August 28 Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon

Come Join the Publicity Committee

Do you know anything about TikTok, Instagram, Reels, or Facebook? Come learn with us, as the LWV of Los Alamos works to modernize our publicity efforts in the months ahead. We are looking for volunteers to help with the effort to incorporate the League's messages regarding democracy, voting, constitutional protections, fair elections, etc. into the latest social media platforms. We also need to revise our brochure, write letters to the editor, and plan for other publicity campaigns. Please contact Leslie Wallstrom if you have any questions or would like to join this committee. We will start to meet once a few people have signed up.¹ Thanks for your concern about protecting our democracy!

Leslie Wallstrom

¹ Leslie's email is: lestim.nm@gmail.com

August Lunch with a Leader: Judge Catherine Taylor

The next Lunch with a Leader will be on August 21 from 11:45-1 p.m. at the Unitarian Fellowship Hall on Sage. Our speaker will be Magistrate Judge Catherine (Katy) Taylor. Judge Taylor was born and raised on California's Central Coast. After earning her bachelor's degree in Political Science from Santa Clara University, she interned with the California Governor's Office and subsequently went to work on behalf of the banking industry.

Intending to broaden her career in banking regulation, Judge Taylor started law school at the University of San Francisco. But during her second year, as part of a criminal law class, she was assigned to represent two clients with criminal charges in San Francisco Superior Court. That experience resulted in a career change to focus on public service in the criminal courts. After passing the California bar in 2000, Judge Taylor spent eight years as a Deputy District Attorney, prosecuting misdemeanors and felonies, before taking time off when her two children were born. Upon returning to practice, she prosecuted California-licensed attorneys for ethics and professional responsibility violations until she moved to Los Alamos for her husband's job.

Elected Magistrate Judge in 2022, Judge Taylor will speak on the anatomy of a court case, from arrest to sentencing, and the rules of law that guide that process.

Karyl Ann Armbruster



Photo by Kirsten Laskey/ladailypost.com

President's Message: A League Position on the Federal Judiciary

In early March of this year, Los Alamos was one of more than 330 local Leagues around the country to hold a consensus meeting and contribute to the development of a national League position on the federal judiciary. The League has had longstanding positions on the legislative branch and executive branch, but never the judicial branch. The full position is set out in the current issue of La Palabra: [Summer2025.pdf](#)

There are no surprises here. As someone who was a first-year law school student 45 years ago, I was slightly impatient in March that, although our local meeting was perfectly enjoyable, so many webinars, readings, and meetings would be necessary to offer such profoundly simple exhortations: "All powers of the US government should be exercised within the constitutional framework..." And, "within the bounds of the US Constitution, the overarching principles of transparency, accountability, independence, and ethics are essential to an effective federal judiciary ... and ... essential for a strong democracy ..."

The League position does not expressly call out the US Supreme Court, yet it is that Court in recent years that has shown the importance of the overarching principles, primarily in their breach.

Transparency and Independence: federal court documents, proceedings and rulings should be open to the public (allowing for limited exceptions to protect sensitive information), but the Supreme Court has employed a "shadow docket" with increasing frequency. Unsigned orders on substantive matters are issued quickly without explanation, following limited briefing. As Justice Kagan said recently, the Court is supposed to explain things to litigants and to the public generally. Explanations foster public trust and compliance with the rule of law. Justice Kavanaugh's response this week, that the Court doesn't want to issue hasty decisions with binding opinions, would be more compelling if the Court screened shadow docket petitions to address only those cases requiring immediate action rather than leaping to empower the president.

Accountability and Ethics: All other federal judges (state judges and many administrative judges as well) have been subject to enforceable codes of ethics for a very long time. Only the US Supreme Court has been exempt from such a code, and the ethical code they adopted recently without detail and without a mechanism for enforcement means they will not hold themselves accountable for the integrity of their actions. In recent years we have learned about lavish gifts to a few of the justices, failure to recuse from matters involving wealthy personal friends, wives who supported an insurrection or a breach in the separation of church and state, or who made millions of dollars "recruiting" lawyers, and more.

Stare Decisis: Respect for precedent in most matters promotes predictability and stability of law.* Precedent should sometimes be overruled (the Dred Scott decision comes to mind), but the recent spate of decisions overruling many longstanding precedents has been chaotic, not well-reasoned, and led law professors to wonder how to teach constitutional law these days.

Felicia Orth

The League position sets out what we expect from the federal courts, would buttress the courts' legitimacy, and would assure that everyone's rights and freedoms are safeguarded in our democracy.

Observer Corps Report – County Council – July 8

Election Logistic; EV Charging Infrastructure Expansion; Sustainability and Climate Action Update; Trinity Drive Electrical Replacement

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

As part of the consent agenda, the Council appointed four members of the community, including LWVLA 1st Vice-President Leslie Wallstrom, to serve a two-year term on the Los Alamos Community Health Council.

Election Logistics and Mobile Voting Unit

The Council designated polling places for primary and midterm elections in 2026 and 2027, confirming that the current locations are sufficient for county needs. School board election logistics were not included in this action. County Clerk Michael Redondo confirmed that the mobile voting unit (MVU) will be reserved for emergencies only—such as a polling location being rendered inoperable.

The Secretary of State is finalizing rules for emergency voting operations, potentially allowing counties to share MVUs. Los Alamos County is open to sharing its unit or deploying it as a temporary polling place if necessary.

EV Charging Infrastructure Expansion

Sustainability Manager Angelica Gurule presented a proposal for expanding EV charging infrastructure at the Municipal Building. The project involves replacing three outdated chargers with six new Level 2 stations capable of delivering 19 kW per port. These new chargers will be ADA-compliant and include safety shut-offs developed in

collaboration with the Fire Department to protect both the public and first responders during emergencies.

The site was chosen for its proximity to County offices, its accessibility to the public, and its use by the county fleet and visitors. The chargers are compatible with most modern EVs and meet national standards. According to staff, the new system will allow for data monitoring, supporting network integration, and charging two vehicles simultaneously per station. There will be a charge of \$0.23 per kilowatt-hour to pay for operations and management.

Council voted unanimously to pay for the installation.

Sustainability and Climate Action Updates

Gurule also gave a comprehensive update on the County's sustainability efforts. The County:

- received 11 proposals for climate marketing and engagement services, the highest ever, to promote greenhouse gas reduction education and support our Climate Action Plan (CAP).
- is developing a long-term plan for home energy audits.
- initiated an EV fleet conversion plan in March.
- conducted site visits at county facilities to evaluate power loads, infrastructure capacity, and current conditions. A draft fleet transition plan is expected in October.
- received an NMDOT grant for two fast-charging EV stations at the library. Construction costs are rising and the County must cover the remaining expenses.

Staff are working on Climate Action Plan implementation strategies. The Environmental Sustainability Board continues to evaluate options, including revisiting Councilor Ryti's plastic bag reduction. Outreach has included participation in science festivals and helping students with the LAHS first Eco Summit.

Trinity Drive Electrical Replacement Project

The Council approved a project to replace the primary electric feeder line — mostly buried between Oppenheimer and Timber Ridge on Trinity Drive — which serves the entire Western Area. The preferred construction method is to install the lines under the sidewalk on both sides of Trinity. Council discussed possible traffic congestion and noted that driveways could be harder to access during construction.

Construction will require a lane closure, a reduced speed limit, and the use of flaggers.* While initial estimates suggested four months, trenching under the sidewalk may reduce that to eight weeks.* The Trinity “road diet” project, slated for early 2026, will not coincide but may have overlapping implications.

Jody Benson

facility. The final rezoning ensures that the facility is fully located within Institutional zoning. As Planning Manager Danyelle Valdez said, “Together, the rezone and lot line adjustment create a consistently zoned parcel that is appropriately sized to accommodate the new fire station and maintain public safety operations.”

The site for the proposed Fire Station 4 upgrade/replacement was selected by the County Council on November 12, 2024, following an online survey and three public site selection meetings.

A neighborhood meeting to discuss the zone map amendment was held on March 6, 2025.

Ron Nelson brought up a question that he’d heard about where the parking would be. He was told that the parking would be fully contained on site, and not on the street.

A motion to approve passed 5 to 0 with Commissioner Brown abstaining.

Jody Benson

Observer Corps Report – Planning & Zoning Commission – July 9

Commissioners present: Rachel Adler (Acting Chair), Stephanie Nakhleh, Katherine Bruell, Marlon Brown, Ronald Nelson, Rebecca White

Commissioners absent: Benjamin Hill (Vice-Chair), Karen Easton (Chair)

Minor Zone Map Amendment of Fire Station 4 and Adjacent Open Space

The purpose of the July 9 hearing was to consider approval of a Minor Zone Map Amendment to rezone 0.43 acres on Range Road from Open Space-Passive Open (OS-PO) to Institutional (INS) for the purpose of replacing Fire Station 4 with a new, expanded

Observer Corps Report – County Council – July 15

Airport Briefing; Board of Public Utilities Update; Department of Public Utilities Update; draft Pedestrian Safety and Accessibility Plan

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

Councilor Ryn Herrmann was absent.

Airport Briefing

Airport Manager Gary Goddard gave a brief report. He noted the challenges for Los

Alamos Airport: the ever-increasing costs, no commercial air service, aging pilot demographics. However, the airport is essential for firefighting support, medical operations, and educational programs. Goddard presented his plan to “expand access, enhance use, and rebuild the civic connection.” Notable among his proposals, to create the first net-zero terminal by adding solar panels, heat pumps, and modern controls.



The new airport logo for Los Alamos Airport. (Source: Los Alamos County)

Board of Public Utilities (BPU) Presentation

Overview of Services and Goals:

BPU Chair Robert Gibson provided a comprehensive overview of the board activities.* The BPU advises the Department of Public Utilities (DPU), which oversees four utility services: wastewater, water, natural gas, and electricity — including services for the Department of Energy (DOE) and Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). With 108 full-time employees, BPU/DPU prioritizes maintaining a high level of service at a reasonable cost, addressing safety, outages, and financial sustainability.

The BPU/DPU is committed to long-term goals, including transitioning to carbon-free electricity and eventually phasing out natural gas. While the County lacks the authority to compel private electrification, BPU offers educational and technical support to facilitate

this transition. The department is also actively studying system capacity to ensure it can support increased electrification.

Key Project Updates:

- **Energy Coordination Agreement (ECA):** The longstanding agreement with LANL to pool energy resources is up for renewal. Gibson cited concerns about delays, with DOE sitting on the revised ECA for over a year. The current extension runs only through December, and the BPU insists on sufficient time for County review.
- **Foxtail Flats Solar Project:** Located near Farmington, this large solar and storage project is delayed by approximately seven months, awaiting NEPA approval. Once regulatory approvals are secured, a business plan will be finalized.
- **Cove Fort (Utah) Geothermal Project:** The County’s share of this baseload project is 4 MW, contingent on securing transmission rights. This represents part of BPU’s search for carbon-free baseload power, alongside nuclear and hydroelectric options.

System Capacity and Modernization:

Gibson emphasized the need to modernize aging infrastructure. The DPU also needs to provide additional resources to satisfy the projected increase in demand.

Water Supply Challenges:

The County’s PM-3 high-producing well remains offline due to a chromium contamination issue.* Usage in Los Alamos is gradually declining, but LANL’s demand—especially for computer cooling—is expected to rise. A new well is being considered in White Rock (in Overlook Park) to access the County’s San Juan-Chama water rights (1,200 acre-feet/year). However, water rights do not guarantee delivery if water isn’t available (due to drought).

Council Discussion and Responses:

- **Councilor Reagor** asked how BPU plans to bridge power supply gaps for solar,

especially for nighttime needs. Gibson noted that we continue to rely on hydroelectric power from western dams and still have a contractual obligation to accept coal power.

- **Councilor Neal-Clinton** raised questions about funding for ongoing substation projects.* Gibson clarified that while some projects are covered by the operating budget, major investments rely on rate-based bonds, with customer revenue as the primary funding source.
- **Councilor Ryti** inquired about DOE's role in supporting a potential new well, given their impact on PM-3.* He also raised concerns about San Juan-Chama water quality due to Rio Grande pollution. DPU Director Philo Shelton explained the County would access water through a legal "exchange" system involving groundwater close enough to the river to qualify.

DPU Project Briefing

DPU Director Shelton shared updates on several critical infrastructure projects:

- **Elk Ridge Gas Line Replacement:** Construction began on July 12, with completion expected within 90 days. The new system will provide a gas hookup for each mobile home. Cartright Services will handle individual home connections. Once complete, the old gas line will be purged and abandoned.
- **Jemez Mountain Fire Protection Pipeline:** Trenching and installation for the first half of the \$18 million project is expected to finish on schedule in the fall. Construction of the 500,000-gallon water tank on West Road will begin at the end of July.* The entire project is scheduled to be completed at the end of 2026.
- **Project Funding Concerns:** The \$18 million project is a cost-sharing agreement between the County (\$2M), the State (\$7.9M), and Pajarito Mountain Group (\$2M). There is also a cost-share agreement between DPU and Pajarito for \$6.1M, and a \$5M FEMA grant that remains

pending, awaiting sign-off by federal officials.

Pedestrian Safety and Accessibility Plan

Wilson and Company Consultant Noah Burke presented the final draft of the updated Los Alamos Pedestrian Master Plan. The purpose of the plan is to guide development of pedestrian infrastructure to improve safety and accessibility.* The final presentation to the Transportation Board is scheduled for Aug 7, and Council will be asked to adopt it on August 26.

The draft includes recommendations for specific improvements in the Los Alamos Townsite and White Rock Town Center.

Short term (0-2 years), it suggests:

- Focus on quick-win safety improvements;
- Crosswalk repainting and signage updates;
- Speed feedback sign installations;
- ADA curb ramp priority upgrades.

Long-term Vision (5+ years)

- Major corridor reconstructions
- Comprehensive sidewalk width improvements
- Complete Streets implementations
- Enhanced connectivity to trail systems

In response to a question, Burke said that some funding is available this fiscal year for safety improvements, such as at the Golf Course and along NM 502, where animal collisions are frequent.

Jody Benson

Observer Corps Report – Planning & Zoning Commission – July 23

Commissioners present: Karen Easton, Chair; Benjamin Hill, Vice Chair; Rachel Adler; Marlon Brown; Katherine Bruell; Stephanie Nakhleh; Ronald Nelson; and Rebecca White

Minor Zone Map Amendment for the Arbolada Subdivision

Chair Karen Easton presided over the request by Consensus Planning and Titan Development on behalf of property owners Sonja Donaldson and Sande Cremer for a Minor Zone Map Amendment to rezone Lots 1–23 and Tracts 1, 2, and 3 of the preliminarily approved replat of the Arbolada Subdivision, located at 659 San Ildefonso Road on North Mesa. The request involved changing the zoning from Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) to Single-Family Residential (SFR-5) to allow for 23 single-family residential lots with minimum lot widths of 50 feet and minimum lot sizes of 5,000 square feet.

Senior planner Desirae Lujan confirmed that the request covered only the western portion of the site—specifically, the 23 single-family lots—and not Tract 4, where a cottage development is planned. Tract 4 will be addressed separately at a later date.

Josh Rogers (Titan Development) said the 23 houses will range from 2,000 to 3,500 square feet in size and emphasized that the development could help address Los Alamos's significant housing shortage. He explained that zoning constraints and high land costs make it difficult to build affordable housing, but that increasing density helps reduce per-unit land costs.

Two members of the public spoke in favor of the rezone. A third resident asked if a tot lot would be included in the development. She learned that it was in the plan. Following public comment, and a review of the decision criteria required for a zone map amendment, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the rezoning.

Jody Benson

Observer Corps Report – County Council – July 29

Wildlife Feeding Ordinance; 20th St. Redevelopment Overview; Saturday Bus Service Pilot Program

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

Wildlife Feeding Ordinance

On January 14, 2025, County Council passed a motion directing the County manager to return to Council with additional input and analysis, including traffic accident data and experience from the town of Ruidoso and other information as appropriate before returning to Council with a revised ordinance prohibiting the feeding of wildlife in the County.

Police Chief Dino Sgambellone presented the revised ordinance, which has been slightly changed in response to public comment and “massaged by legal.” Feeding birds, including waterfowl, is not prohibited. He also gave the information requested by Council in January.

In 2022 there were 61 animal-versus vehicle accidents; in 2023 there were 62; in 2025 there were 76. However, this year there have only been 19 in six months. Ruidoso passed an ordinance banning the feeding of wildlife in 2019, but the police chief there had no measurable data for vehicle accidents since then. The animal control supervisor felt that the deer population is healthier now.

In response to questions from Council, Chief Sgambellone said he would not expect an immediate impact if the ordinance passed. He said enforcement would be his concern because “some people are very passionate about this issue on both sides....I don’t know that we can meet that expectation.”

Councilor Ryti moved to direct County Manager to implement the draft ordinance changes and return to Council with a revised ordinance prohibiting the feeding of wildlife in the County. The vote to bring it back was 6 to 1 with Councilor Reagor opposed, saying he did not believe an ordinance would affect the size of the deer population.

Overview of Proposal for the 20th Street Redevelopment

Housing and Special Projects Manager Dan Osborn explained that RBMM Development is proposing to purchase three parcels totaling three acres on 20th St. from the County for its appraised value of \$1,770,000.00, and to construct ~285 housing units, ~25,000 square feet of retail space, and a parking structure. Their plan includes an easement for the Canyon Rim Trail. They expect the County to reimburse them for up to \$3,630,055.43 for trail connections; design and installation of a new traffic signal; intersection improvements and roadway striping, and expanded on-street parking.

The developers, Russell Brott and Marcel Montoya, explained the concept, which is a redevelopment with family friendly units connecting the Canon Rim Trail to Ashley Pond. The housing will be market rate; there will also be some small-scale retail.

Council asked a few questions, but there was no vote. The discussion will continue at the next meeting, on August 5.

Saturday Transit Service Pilot Program

Transit Manager James Barela explained that the County has planned for years to provide bus service on Saturdays, but was unable to do so, first because of the pandemic and more recently due to staff shortage. However, now they are starting a pilot program to provide on demand bus service for the next 13 Saturdays, from August 2 through October 25. The door to door service is available to pick up riders from 9-5:30 in Los Alamos and White Rock. Passengers can use the MyRide App or call (505) 664-RIDE between 8:30 and 5. Reservations can only be made on the day they want a ride.

Barbara Calef

July Lunch with a Leader: Liz Martineau

Liz Martineau, Executive Director of the Los Alamos Community Foundation (LACF) presented a wide-ranging discussion around the challenges and opportunities facing the 150+ nonprofit organizations that serve the Los Alamos community.

Martineau stated that the goals of the LACF are to support local non-profits, to enhance philanthropy in the community, and to connect nonprofits, donors, and volunteers. Her job is to help all of them. She leads the monthly Executive Director Roundtable for organizations that have employees, like PEEC. She noted that the turnover of executive directors is



Elizabeth Martineau. Photo by Gordon McDonough

huge. Therefore, most of them are new to their positions. They need advice about fundraising, taxes, employees, etc., and the roundtable provides a venue for collaboration and support. LACF offers non-profits training, grants, advocacy, shared resources, and volunteer appreciation to all non-profits.

The Role of Endowments: Funding the Future

For nonprofits, endowments are like a piggy bank, meant to fund the future. Donors can give to a specific non-profit, but Martineau recommends setting up an endowment at the LACF, where collaboration gets “more for the buck.”

Most of the interest from the LACF endowment, currently worth about \$1.4M, funds grants. Some of the grants are competitive. Each year, organizations can apply for available funding through a competitive grant cycle, ensuring that the money makes a broad and dynamic impact.

Endowments may be designated for specific purposes—like public school music programs or youth sports. Some go directly to specific organizations like Little Theater.

Importantly, endowment funds are held by the Community Foundation, not the nonprofit itself. This ensures:

- legal protection (funds are shielded if an organization is sued);
- sustainability (funds are managed by professional advisors); and
- donor intent (if the original organization dissolves, the funds can be directed to another with a similar mission, as specified in original documentation).

The Community Foundation funds in turn are held by Enterprise Bank and invested by financial advisers in a diversified portfolio.

LAUNCH Initiative

LACF has introduced a new initiative: Los Alamos United for Community Health, or LAUNCH. Martineau said that no one organization can tackle the entire scope of community health alone, so this program takes a collaborative approach to wellness. This comprehensive approach is supported by Anchorum Health Foundation, which funds emergency health programs and broader wellness efforts throughout Northern New Mexico. Anchorum will provide funds to LACF for the next five years. The foundation recently hired Brandi Weiss as a program manager; she manages the Anchorum funds.

Martineau met with Jessica Strong, Manager of the LAC Social Services Division, to discuss where local and regional non-profits can contribute. They decided to begin by promoting mental health care and suicide prevention training.

What Can I Do?

Martineau said the community needs to do a better job of talking about mental health. She said we need to check in with others, connect, take a class. She recommended the one-hour ABC Suicide Prevention class, a new state-wide program. Live sessions are offered regularly in both Los Alamos and White Rock. NM Suicide Prevention will pay for a session if there are ten or more attendees. If there are fewer than ten, LACF will pay. The League of Women Voters, or any organization, could sponsor a training session as a show of commitment to mental health awareness.

Other recommendations are:

- Contact people personally. Invite them to participate — not just through email, but by picking up the phone or starting a conversation.
- Donate to nonprofits. Whether through one-time giving or planned estate contributions, your support fuels real change.
- Connect with other organizations.
- Attend upcoming events, such as: “Creating and Giving from Your Estate Plan,” Monday, August 25, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at SALA Event Center. It’s free, lunch is included. **Register at www.unmfund.org by Monday, Aug. 18.**

Martineau reiterated that together we can build a stronger, healthier, and more sustainable future for our non-profits — and for our neighbors. If we invest wisely, reach out often, and care deeply, Los Alamos can be a model of resilience and generosity for generations to come.

Jody Benson



MEMBERSHIP FORM

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

Name: _____

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.)

After we receive your payment, we will send you a link to ~~an~~ interactive membership form with questions about how you wish to receive League news and ways to be active in the League. Please fill out the form and return to sender.

Rev. 5/23/2025

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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League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

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