UPDATE

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

October 2	LWVLA Voter Guide distributed with the LA Daily Post
October 6	Candidate Forum, 7 p.m. (6:30 p.m. for refreshments), Piñon School Gym
October 7	Early Voting Begins
October 16	Lunch with a Leader, Unitarian Church, Danielle Prokop, 11:45 a.m.
October 23	Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon
November 4	Election Day, Polls are open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Candidate Forum October 6

On Monday, October 6, the League will host a candidate forum from 7 to 9 p.m. in the new gym at Piñon School on Sherwood Blvd. in White Rock. We have invited the candidates for the three offices, which include School Board Districts 1 and 2, UNMLA Advisory Board, and Mirador Public Improvement District Board. Come at 6:30 PM for cookies and conversation.

Early voting starts on Tuesday, October 7 in the Municipal Building in Los Alamos. Election Day is November 4.

The Los Alamos League of Women Voters Voter Guide was inserted in the LA Daily Post delivered to all addresses in the County on Thursday, October 2. On October 5 you will be able to find your ballot online at Vote411.

UNM-LA Advisory Board

All registered voters in Los Alamos can vote for three UNM-LA Advisory Board members, who are elected at large to represent the community. Their role is to "serve as an advisory body to the UNM Board of Regents on matters related to the UNMLA branch campus. They provide input on the branch's priorities, act as a sounding board for the Chancellor, approve the annual budget, and assist in approving and certifying the tax levy to Los Alamos County and calling elections for both tax levies and Advisory Board position." The four candidates (listed alphabetically) who have filed for the three positions are: Brian Fearey, David Hampton, Conner Tharp, and Andrew Wright.

School Board

For the 2025 election, only the White Rock area, Royal Crest, and some sections of Eastern Area in the Townsite will vote for Districts 1 and 2. School Board members, as per New Mexico law, represent a particular school; however, because in New Mexico our School Boards are districted according to population and not necessarily according to the school your child attends, voting for the Board is a little confusing. For example, Elk Park, DP Road, East Road, and residents on Trinity along with a smattering of homes north of Canyon Road, will vote for District 1, Piñon School in White Rock even though the Townsite students go to Aspen. (Please check the District Map below.)

https://www.laschools.net/school-board/district-maps

Although New Mexico law restricts the School Board's powers and duties to only five areas — developing policies, hiring and supervising the superintendent, reviewing and approving the budget, managing property, suing and being sued — each of these duties requires the commitment to use these mandates for the benefit of the entire community, including that of our out-of-district students.

Two candidates have filed for District 1: Stephanie Ann Galvez, and Margie Serrato. Three candidates are competing to represent District 2: Tamara L. Hinckley, Antonio Ray Jaurigue, and Jasmine Stephens.

Mirador

The Mirador Public Improvement District Board is open only to residents of Mirador in White Rock. The Mirador PID Board oversees the Mirador neighborhood to manage infrastructure projects such as roads, utilities, and other amenities that benefit only the residents of Mirador. The MPID Board has three vacancies and nine candidates: Juan Manuel Galvez, Megan Hesselink, Sandy Jones, Katharine Allene Martín, Nicholas Michael Martín, Erik Pavlina, Robert (Bob) Qualick, Elizabeth Summa, and Ken Summa.

For more information about the 2025 general election, visit:

https://www.losalamosnm.us/Home/Tabs/Whats-Happening/Election-Information .

Jody Benson

The Election Season Has Begun!

At the September 9 County Council meeting LWVLA members Ellen Mills, Barbara Calef, Hedy Dunn, and Becky Shankland, together with County Clerk Michael Redondo, accept a Proclamation from Councilor Randy Ryti designating September as Voter Registration Month and Sept. 16 as Voter Registration Day in Los Alamos. Photo by Julie Williams-Hill.

Welcome, New Member!

Rebecca (Becky) Howard writes: I have lived in Los Alamos for 40 years. I graduated from Northern Arizona University with a degree in Dental Hygiene (a long time ago). I have worked for Dr. William Parker, now Ghiassi Periodontics for 39 years, and I am down to working just 2 days/month. The perfect retirement job!

I love Los Alamos and like to hike and spend time outdoors. I am an associate board member with the Los Alamos Concert Association and am also on the board with Coro de Camara.

October Lunch with a Leader: *Danielle Prokop*

Danielle Prokop. Photo: Source NM.

This month's Lunch with a Leader will be on October 16, at the Unitarian Church on Sage St. from 11:45-1pm. Our leader will be Danielle Prokop, an award-winning journalist who was born and raised in Los Alamos. While pursing international studies at the University of New Mexico, she got her first taste for print at the *Daily Lobo*, and hasn't stopped since. After graduation, she worked at the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, first on the copy desk and eventually on general assignment. In 2020, she moved (sight unseen) to the western Nebraska panhandle, covering wildfires, water fights, and paved road drama for the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*. She then headed for far west Texas, embarking on environmental coverage for both sides of the Rio Grande in El Paso.

Prokop returned to writing stories about New Mexico in 2022, first as a freelancer, then full-time staff writer for the online publication *Source NM*. Her work has included a fourteen-part series on the Rio Grande from Colorado through New Mexico and West Texas, breaking news inside the Roundhouse, and along roads less traveled. One of the topics she will address is whether the role journalism plays in society is changing.

She's an aspiring skier, avid reader, and a martial artist. When not at her desk, she can be found reading at a coffee shop, often with her husband, Justin, or out walking their three rescue dogs.

Karyl Ann Armbruster

Observer Corps Report — *County Council – September 9*

East Downtown Los Alamos MRA Plan

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

East Downtown Los Alamos MRA Plan

Council passed a resolution in support of the East Downtown Los Alamos Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) Plan. The motion passed 5–1, with Councilor Reagor in opposition. Having this adopted MRA plan gives the County authority under State Statute to contribute public resources to private redevelopment projects to help catalyze reinvestment in East Downtown Los Alamos.

What's in the Plan?

The 29-acre East Downtown Los Alamos MRA is centered around Mari Mac Village and includes additional commercial properties adjacent to Central Avenue and Trinity Drive, said Economic Development Program Manager Anita Barela (Community Development Department). All 19 parcels within the MRA boundary are privately owned, she said. The MRA boundary was adopted by Council in May 2024.

- Consultant Amy Bell (Anthropopulus Design + Planning) detailed the plan's development, community engagement, and recommendations. Bell emphasized the plan’s potential strategic approaches to stimulate economic vitality, housing, and infrastructure improvements in the MRA.

The MRA Plan enables the County to use a variety of redevelopment tools to support revitalization of East Downtown Los Alamos, said Bell. These include:

- public-private partnerships (PPPs),
- creation of an MRA Fund,
- establishment of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District, and
- negotiation of public benefits, such as small business support and affordable housing.

The plan itself does not put any of these tools into effect; rather it provides the legal basis for the County to start that process if the Council decides that is the way it wants to go.

Barela and Bell both stressed that participation by businesses and property owners in MRA projects and partnerships is strictly voluntary. County Manager Anne Laurent noted that she was aware of private owners who are looking to potentially submit project applications. However, any contribution of public resources to specific MRA projects must meet plan objectives, provide tangible community benefit, and undergo public hearing and approval by the County Council, said Bell.

Councilor Ryti highlighted the need for a community benefit-scoring matrix to evaluate how proposed projects submitted by applicants would advance plan objectives and provide community benefits. Councilor Reagor raised concerns about MRA boundary definitions and the inclusion of fully occupied buildings in the MRA. Local business owner Lisa Shin was also concerned about potential impacts on small businesses.

What's Next?

CDD Director Elias Isaacson said that his department was focused on making available an MRA application, handbook, and websites for the East Downtown Los Alamos MRA as well as for the White Rock MRA within the next month. The application and handbook will include a Scoring Matrix to show how a project can meet community objectives of the MRA district. CDD plans to have a series of Q and A sessions to help refine both those documents before releasing them to the public, Isaacson said.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

Observer Corps Report – *Planning & Zoning Commission – September 10*

The Commission approved amendments to the County Development Code by correcting errors, resolving inconsistencies, and adding missing definitions to ensure clarity, consistency, and alignment with the County's adopted plans and policies. None of the changes were relevant to Los Alamos League positions.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

Observer Corps Report – *County Council – September 16*

NNSA Update, Parcel A-8-A

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

NNSA Quarterly Update

Ted Wyka, NNSA Los Alamos Field Office Manager, updated the County Council on various aspects of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). No action was taken.

Mission Impacts

LANL's funding profile remains steady, with a slight upward trajectory related to the passage of the budget reconciliation process. LANL plans some modest hiring in addition to replacing its annual attrition of about 900 staff.

Electrical Power Capacity Upgrade Project (EPCU)

NNSA issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to its environmental assessment of the Lab's EPCU project, as did the Santa Fe National Forest and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Onsite infrastructure upgrades for the EPCU are scheduled to begin this fall. Construction of the transmission line on BLM and Santa Fe National Forest lands is scheduled to begin in fall 2026.

Traffic Safety

Wyka felt that traffic safety issues are showing improvement. Based on internal telemetry data, van pool usage is up, taking more cars off the road. He said the bus ridership is also steadily increasing.

Traffic Enforcement

NNSA continues to work with the Los Alamos Police Department (LAPD) to install police speed cameras along the Truck Route. LAPD is purchasing the cameras and LANL will install the utility connections and the pole structures for them. NNSA is also working with the County to establish a memorandum of understanding for the speed camera safety enforcement at the Lab.

Rendija Canyon Cleanup

NNSA is collaborating with the US Corps of Engineers to develop a cost estimate for cleaning up residual contamination from the Rendija Canyon site. The cleanup itself has not been budgeted.

Multi-income Workforce Housing on DP Road

Council introduced an ordinance for the proposed sale of undeveloped County property known as Parcel A-8-A (also known as 125 DP Road) to Servitas LLC for redevelopment as mixed-density, mixed-income residential development.

Details about the development partner, project concepts, and the high-level business terms were previously presented at the Council's regular session on August 26, 2025.

A public hearing and consideration for adoption is tentatively scheduled for September 30.

The study also recommended that DPU perform a new Integrated Resource Plan to determine the optimal resource selection of power generation based on the market.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

Observer Corps Report – *County Council – September 30*

Affordable & Market Rate Housing on DP Road, Wildlife Feeding Ordinance, EV Chargers at Mesa Public Library, GRT Overview, Los Alamos Local Business Coalition, Local/Small Business Engagement Working Group

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

Affordable and Market Rate Housing on DP Road

Voting unanimously (7–0), Council approved an ordinance for the sale of undeveloped County property known as Parcel A-8-A (also known as 125 DP Road) to Servitas LLC for redevelopment as a mixed-density, mixed-income residential development.

Proposed Housing Project

Dan Osborn, Housing and Special Projects Manager, provided an overview of the proposed housing project on the parcel, which is located east of the intersection of Trinity Drive and DP Road. He said that the project's goal is to increase housing supply and to broaden the variety of housing types available to support a growing population, paying special attention to missing middle housing.

The project will be developed by Servitas, with the County selling the ~22-acre parcel to them for $5.5M, slightly above its appraised value of $5.25M. Osborn said that the project will deliver 380 one-, two- and three-bedroom residential units. Of these, 260 units will be rented at market rate and 120 will be deed-restricted "in perpetuity" for households earning between 60% and 100% AMI (Area Median Income), with an average of 80% AMI.

Osborn said the County will purchase a permanent rent restriction on 88 of the 120 units for $5.5M. The remaining 32 deed-restricted units will be acquired by the County as reimbursement for pre-development expenses such as design, permitting fees, and studies. The cost for these deed restrictions, and maximum reimbursement, will be $2M.

The total County investment for the 120 deed-restricted units is $7.5M, Osborn said. This equates to a cost to the County of about $23K per bedroom. He noted that, with a GRT rate of 7.0625%, the County will receive about $5M in GRT revenue from the construction of the project.

Public Access to Trails

Garrett Scharton, Senior Vice President with Servitas, pointed out a provision in the new Purchase Agreement added to address a concern raised by Councilor Ryti about public access to the trails within the property. The new agreement contains explicit provisions for public access. The developer has consented to build an extension of the Canyon Rim Trail along the Los Alamos Canyon rim and out to DP Road and to grant an easement to the County for this segment. There will also be a publicly accessible path on the north edge of the development, along the south rim of DP Canyon.

Project Schedule

The project is expected to be completed within 30 months. Scharton said that the development would have a phased opening, with the first unit being open for occupancy about 16–18 months after the start of construction.

Wildlife Feeding Ordinance

Voting 6–1, Council adopted an ordinance prohibiting the intentional feeding of wildlife on both public and private land within the County. The ordinance makes an exception for feeding songbirds and pollinators.

Councilor Reagor voted in opposition because he felt the ordinance would be ineffective.

Provisions in the Ordinance

The ordinance defines wild animals as "any animal that is wild by nature and cannot normally be domesticated or controlled, including any animal regulated by the NM Department of Game and Fish, including but not limited to bears, cougars, deer, and elk."

The ordinance enumerates public health and safety issues that can be exacerbated by wildlife feeding, such as damage to public and private property, the spread of diseases among wildlife, pets, and people, and more vehicle-animal collisions. Feeding can interrupt natural migration patterns and cause nutritional problems. Intentional feeding by people can make wild animals more aggressive in demanding food.

Violations would result in fines, starting at a minimum of $25 for the first offense and ranging from $100 to $750 for repeat offenses.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Chargers at Mesa Public Library

Voting unanimously (7–0), Council adopted a resolution of support for the Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure Project funded by the NM Department of Transportation (NMDOT) to construct EV chargers at Mesa Public Library.

Explaining why this draft resolution was brought before Council, the County staff report said that the County was selected by NMDOT to receive a grant of $435K to construct two Direct Current Fast Charger (DCFC) stations at Mesa Public Library. As part of the grant application, the County was required to provide a resolution affirming its commitment to fund, build, and maintain the project.

Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) and Financial Overview

Voting 6–1, Council directed the County Manager to return with a proposed ordinance for Council consideration to increase the County's GRT rate by 5/8 cent, to be introduced on October 7, 2025, followed by a public hearing on October 28, 2025. The ordinance would be effective July 1, 2026.

Current GRT Revenue and Long-Range Projections

Helen Perraglio, County Administrative Services Director, began by reporting that an unanticipated 14% reduction in GRT revenue in FY2025 caused a $4M shortfall. The budget adopted by Council in April 2025 was based on the assumption that GRT revenue would only be 10% lower.

The current GRT is 7.0620%. This comprises a base GRT rate of 5.125% imposed by the State supplemented by a local rate of 2.1875% set by Los Alamos County. GRT revenue is used to fund local projects and services.

Under the current GRT rate, by FY2028 the County is projected to lack enough revenue to cover its expenses. Perraglio’s projections indicate that, at a minimum, the GRT rate will need to be increased by 1/2-cent in order for the County to maintain financial stability.

Options for GRT Rate Increases

Perraglio presented three scenarios for an increase to the County's GRT rate: 1/2 cent, 9/16 cent, and 5/8 cent.

- A 1/2-cent increase to the current GRT rate (to 7.5625%) would result in a small deficit starting in FY2029, requiring a 10% reduction in expenditures, or close to $11M. The deficit would increase in FY2030 and beyond. With a 1/2-cent rate increase, a consumer would have to pay an additional $0.50 for a $100 purchase of taxable goods or services.

- A 9/16-cent increase (to 7.6250%) would maintain a positive reserve and provide more flexibility, allowing for more discretion in programming such as transfers for affordable housing or capital projects. The County's target reserves would remain positive throughout the 10-year financial projection. The increase amounts to an additional $0.57 for a $100 purchase.
- A 5/8-cent increase (to 7.6875%) would provide the most room for growth, allowing for expansion in the out years and weathering tough years more comfortably. This rate increase amounts to an additional $0.63 for a $100 purchase.

The presentation included a comparison of Los Alamos's current GRT rate of 7.0625% to that of its neighbors. Los Alamos has the next to lowest GRT rate (ranking 32 out of 33) in New Mexico. Taos (9.1750%) and Española (8.6875%) have the two highest rates.

Impact if the GRT Rate Is Not Increased

Perraglio discussed the consequences if the GRT rate were not increased:

- The County would need immediate budget guidance from Council on where to make significant cuts in expenditures.
- She would recommend pulling the proposed $40M bond ordinance that is slated to finance the Community Broadband Project. The County's bond rating score is based partially on its fiscal management, so a lower bond rating would translate into higher interest charges.
- For the same reason, Perraglio said she would not recommend that the County issue bonds to fund other Capital Improvement Projects already programmed in the County's long-range budget, which total about $35M.

Impact to LANL If the GRT Rate Is Increased

Perraglio's presentation emphasized the County's heavy dependence on LANL and N3B, the contractor for environmental waste management. The current budget shortfall is attributed to the decline in GRT revenue from this sector. Even though the Lab's budget has grown, its expenditures are shifting from construction activities to manufacturing. Manufacturing activities are exempt from GRT.

State Representative Christine Chandler explained that the GRT exemption for manufacturing resulted from action by the State Legislature a few years ago. The intent of the exemption was to recruit manufacturing into the state. "I don't think it dawned on folks that some of the new activities over at TA-55 would be characterized as a manufacturing activity," said Chandler.

She pointed out that, although a GRT increase would have a relatively small effect on County residents, by far the largest portion would be paid by the Lab, probably about 75%. She contended that it was appropriate that the Lab bear the brunt of the increase, given all that the community and the County do to support the Lab's activities.

Funding for Affordable Housing Programs

Perraglio concluded with a discussion of two options by which the increased GRT revenue could potentially be used for an Affordable Housing Fund.

She said Council could budget transfers from the County's General Fund. This approach, recommended by the County staff, would allow for flexibility given the fiscal climate. It is similar to the way the County supplements and/or funds capital projects, Los Alamos Public Schools and UNM-LA grants, the regional fund, and other housing and economic development programs.

Alternatively, Council could opt to dedicate an increment of the GRT revenue to the Affordable Housing Fund.

Council Discussion

Councilor Havemann moved to direct the County Manager to return with a proposed ordinance for a 5/8-cent increase in the GRT rate, with a public hearing on October 28, 2025.

Points listed by councilors in favor of the rate increase emphasized the overall benefit to the community. These benefits include enhanced services for residents as well as more funding support for regional partners, local businesses, and affordable housing initiatives.

Councilor Neal-Clinton noted that Los Alamos remains the most affluent county in the state and suggested that, even with the increase, the County still offers a good value compared to other areas.

Although she voted in favor of the motion, Councilor Hand expressed concern about the impact on the community, particularly on those already facing multiple increases and the uncertainty of future economic stability.

Councilor Reagor opposed the motion, saying, "It's way too soon to do this." He proposed that Council delay a decision until after its strategic planning session so that it could more thoroughly review the projections. "I don't know what's in this number," he continued. "There's not enough detail to figure out what's going on at all."

Los Alamos Local Business Coalition

Members of the Los Alamos Local Business Coalition presented Council with their findings and recommendations to address key challenges faced by local businesses. The Coalition is a volunteer, grass-roots initiative formed in November 2024, which has grown to 80 members.

Key Challenges for Local Businesses

Leslie Linke, a member of the steering team for the Coalition, summarized the key challenges discussed in the Coalition's report. To identify issues affecting local businesses, the Coalition hosted public forums and reviewed County plans, including the Comprehensive Plan, Housing Plan, and Tourism Plan.

Linke reported the Coalition's conclusion that, although County plans did a good job addressing issues, implementation was very poor. She said that the Coalition also found restrictive bureaucracy, describing an opaque regulatory environment with lots of rules to be followed and confusion among inspectors and permit approvers in interpreting those rules. Linke noted that entities that were supposed to help businesses were often unwilling or unable to support business ideas effectively. Trust issues were also identified, with several businesses hesitant to engage due to fear of retribution from the County.

Linke listed specific challenges discussed in the report, such as affordable commercial space, high rents, workforce shortages and high housing costs, which make it difficult for businesses to find and house workers. Lack of support and access to funding is another problem, with businesses struggling to navigate grant processes. Linke also highlighted poor communication and underdeveloped tourism strategies which have led to missed opportunities.

Overarching Strategic Priorities

Local businessman Allan Saenz, also a Coalition member, presented the Coalition's suggested options for Council to consider when it sets its upcoming strategic priorities, especially as it seeks to balance investment in local businesses alongside other priorities.

The proposed options prioritize economic development plans and a pro-business culture:

- Robust Implementation of Economic Development Plans: Focus on executing existing plans with measurable metrics for accountability and transparency. Encourage a "Get-to-Yes" mindset to facilitate business operations.
- Pro-Business Culture and Collaborative Governance: Shift from a risk-averse mentality to one that embraces opportunities, fostering trust and open communication with the business community. Ensure that local business

impacts are considered in all County decisions and mitigate disruptions from County projects.

Recommendations to Address Key Challenges

Linke listed practical actions presented in the Coalition's report:

- Initiate programs to increase affordable commercial spaces, such as a Storefront Recapture Initiative and incentives for owner-occupied spaces.
- Simplify permit processes and ensure consistent information for businesses, promoting a "can-do" approach in regulatory interpretation.
- Prioritize housing initiatives and potential voucher programs for workers earning hourly wages of $15–20.
- Enhance support for small businesses through grant-writing resources and local procurement initiatives, while reforming the Local Economic Development Act (LEDA).
- Strengthen tourism efforts by improving communication with local businesses and enhancing visibility through marketing initiatives, such as a Local Business Billboard Collective.

Saenz said that implementation of these actions would require commitment and leadership from the Council. He also emphasized the need for performance metrics and collaboration.

Recommendations to Co-create a Better Business Environment

Linke and Saenz listed the following requests for action by the County:

- Collaborate with the Coalition to review their recommendations and explore implementation.
- Facilitate open dialogue between the County and local businesses to address concerns and build trust.
- Consider establishing regular public meetings to provide updates on the LEDA grant program and engage the business community.
- Investigate specific examples of issues raised by businesses and identify opportunities to improve consistency and transparency in the County's processes.

Local/Small Business Engagement Working Group

The Small Business Working Group, comprising Councilors Herrmann, Reagor, and Ryti, presented findings on local business climate and LEDA programs. The mission of this working group was to engage local small businesses and related community organizations and report to Council on issues and recommendations for future actions.

The Working Group's report highlighted the successful LEDA program in Clovis, NM, and how that city implemented an economic development strategy using LEDA laws. The report also summarized commercial vacancy rates in Los Alamos and White Rock. The report incorporates many of the same topics as the Los Alamos Local Business Coalition report.

Recommended Action Items

The working group recommended two actions to address the loss of vacant commercial land:

- Gather more information about the Smith’s Marketplace property and its development status.
- Explore the development potential of land owned by the County in Santa Fe County, east of East Gate, and other lands in Pueblo Canyon. The land there is relatively flat, and some infrastructure is already available.

Elias Isaacson, Community Development Director, provided an update regarding the County-owned land in Santa Fe County. He and Deputy County Manager Juan Rael met with representatives of Santa Fe County to discuss the potential to develop that property.

Those conversations are ongoing but the initial feedback is that Santa Fe County is receptive.

Other actions proposed by the group to improve the local business climate included enhancing advertising for small businesses, streamlining business startup processes, and improving the transparency and speed of the Change of Use process. The group also suggested that the County monitor and track the amount of business procured locally, look for ways to facilitate professional services (architects, engineers, grant writers, etc.) needed by local businesses, and collaborate with local economic development groups to help review Retail LEDA applications.

During discussion, councilors agreed to add two additional recommendations:

- Investigate ways to improve communication with businesses, property owners, and other stakeholders who are, or could be, impacted by County activities and projects.
- Work with the State to authorize the County to hire electrical and plumbing inspectors to conduct some of the building inspections in-house, so that property owners do not have to wait long periods of time for a State inspector to show up.

Voting unanimously (7–0), Council agreed to accept the Working Group's report as amended, dismantled the Working Group, and directed staff to work on assignments for the next steps as recommended in the report.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

September Lunch with a Leader: *LAMC CEO Tracie Stratton*

Tracie Stratton has worked in Los Alamos from 2012 to 2018, first as Chief Nursing Officer of Los Alamos Medical Center (LAMC) and later in a regional role for LifePoint Health, the owner of LAMC. She returned at the end of 2021 to serve as the CEO of the hospital. She explained that LifePoint Health operates 60 acute care hospitals in the country as well as 23 rehab facilities and about a dozen behavioral health hospitals.

Tracie Stratton, Chief Executive Officer of the Los Alamos Medical Center LAMC photo

Stratton said that LifePoint has been collaborating with Duke University since 2011to construct a quality health care program for its rural hospitals. LAMC is accredited by the Joint Commission; received an A from Leapfrog in the fall of 2023; and 3 stars from CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) the same year. Often the volume is not sufficient to be graded, but Stratton said that LAMC has the beds and staff to absorb more patients.

The challenges of operating a hospital in Los Alamos are, in many respects, the same as for other businesses and the local government. The cost of living is relatively high; there is a shortage of housing; and Stratton must compete with LANL for staff. In addition, Christus St. Vincent will soon be entering the market: they are building a new facility on the old Knights of Columbus site. Stratton said she is committed to working collaboratively with them.

Despite the difficulties, she has recently succeeded in hiring two surgeons, a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, and an obstetrician/gynecologist. In addition, LAMC is acquiring a laparoscopic tower, a new security system, a new radiology room, portable x-ray, sleep lab equipment, two ultrasound machines, a microbiology machine, and is trying to obtain a new MRI.

The list of services offered by the hospital is extensive. There are also several independent clinics in the hospital. Whereas LAMC will never turn away a patient away, they have no control over the medical tenants, some of whom do not accept Medicaid patients. Stratton remarked that Medicaid reimbursement is abysmal. She said that in 2024 the NM legislature, encouraged by the hospitals, passed the Health Care Delivery and Access Act (HDAA) to stabilize hospitals and expand care access via a pooled fund. However, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act jeopardizes the HDAA.

Tracy Stratton, CEO of the Los Alamos Medical Center and Lisa Hampton, LWVLA Board member and Chair of the Los Alamos County Health Council. Photo by Leslie Wallstrom.

Stratton spoke at length about the medical malpractice issue in New Mexico. She agrees with Think New Mexico that some current laws need to be changed and hopes that the governor will add the issue to the agenda for the 2026 legislative session. New Mexico was the only state in the country to suffer a net loss of providers last year with 248 leaving or retiring.

A major reason for the exodus of providers is the high cost of premiums for medical malpractice insurance. The high premiums also put small rural hospitals at risk. The high cost is due to the fact that New Mexico has the second highest rate of medical malpractice lawsuits of any state in the U.S., as well as unlimited amounts for punitive damages, and the lowest standard of proof to receive punitive damages. There is only one company in the state offering medical malpractice insurance.

Stratton suggested some approaches to lower premiums: establish a cap for damages; create a patient compensation fund to ensure continuing access to funds for medical care; place caps on attorney fees; and disallow venue shopping, whereby attorneys file suit in jurisdictions where judgments are most generous.

Barbara Calef

Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies

Tickler Report

Tentative Council Agenda Items as of September 26, 2025

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

[The new format below allows for more items.]

- **Special Meeting, 10/2/25**
  - 2026 Strategic Priorities [Discus/NoAct]
- **Regular Session, 10/7/25**
  - Landfill Methane Monitoring and Maintenance [Approv/Action]
  - Climate Action Marketing and Engagement Services. [Approv/Action]
  - Municipal Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) [Intro/NoAct]
  - Updated Trails and Open Space Management Plan [Presen/NoAct]
  - Bicycle Working Group of the Parks and Recreation Board (PRB) [Presen/NoAct]
  - •Open Space and Trails Working Group on a Volunteer Maintenance Plan [Presen/NoAct]
- **Work Session, 10/21/25**
  - Fleet Conversion Study and Community-Wide Electric Vehicle Charging Plan [Placeholder] [Presen/NoAct]
  - County Health Council Briefing [Presen/NoAct]
  - Jessica Kunkle, Manager of the Department of Energy Environmental Management [Presen/NoAct]
  - North Mesa Recreation Master Plan [Placeholder] [Presen/NoAct]
- **Regular Session, 10/28/25**
  - Artificial Turf Study [Placeholder] [Presen/NoAct]
  - Updated Trails and Open Space Management Plan [Presen/Action]

eComment Tool for Council meetings:

This tool (link below) seems to be broken.: *https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx.*

In the list it presents, no meetings allow comments! See announcement details at:

https://ladailypost.com/county-launches-ecomment-tool-for-council-meetings/

County BCC Vacancies

as of September 30, 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**
  - 3 terms ending March 25 & 27, 2026
- **Board of Public Utilities** **0**
  - No terms ending soon
- **County Health Council** **2**
  - 5 terms ending January 6, 2026
- **Environmental Sustainability Board** **1**
  - No terms ending soon
- **Historic Preservation Advisory Board** **0**
  - No terms ending soon
- **Library Board** **2**
  - No terms ending soon
- **Lodgers' Tax Advisory Board** **0**
  - 1 term ending December 1, 2025
- **Parks and Recreation Board** **0**
  - 4 terms ending November 30, 2025
- **Personnel Board** **1**
  - No terms ending soon
- **Planning and Zoning Commission** **0**
  - No terms ending soon
- **Transportation Board** **0**
  - 4 terms ending February 28, 2026

Totals: 6 vacancies, 17 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 .

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF LOS ALAMOS

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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): ____

* Optional – another LWVLA member in the same household.

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.