

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

November 8	Annual Membership Party, 1577 Camino Medio, 5-7 p.m.
November 14	Public Lawyer of the Year Award to Felicia Orth, Roundhouse, 4 p.m.
November 20	Lunch with a Leader, Unitarian Church, Dena Moscola and Tyler Taylor, 11:45 a.m.

Annual Members Party

Mark your calendars now and join us on Saturday, November 8 from 5-7 p.m. at Ellen Mills's lovely home at 1577 Camino Medio in Los Alamos for our annual membership party. This will be a social event to connect with one another informally.

The board will provide food and beverages. Spouses and other family members are welcome, but you can just bring yourself.

Let's get together!

November Lunch with a Leader: Dena Moscola and Tyler Taylor

Our next Lunch with a Leader will be November 20 at the Unitarian Fellowship Hall from 11:45-1 p.m. There will be no LWL in December. This month we have two special leaders, Dena Moscola, Executive Director of the Española Pathways Shelter, and Dr. Tyler Taylor, Coordinator for the Interfaith Coalition on Homelessness, whose main focus is preventing homelessness and expanding treatment of addiction disorders in Española.

When Dena Moscola moved to New Mexico from New Jersey ten years ago, her first new friend was from Española and was struggling with heroin addiction. Moscola soon learned that this small town faced serious struggles with generational addiction, poverty, and homelessness. She helped her friend into rehab only to discover that there were many gaps and barriers in the system. Her frustrations turned into a deep desire to help the members of this community get the support they deserve.

Five years later, in December of 2019, Moscola was hired by the Española Pathways Shelter as their Executive Director. She led the opening of Española's first warming center, first low-barrier homeless shelter, first Transitional Housing Program, and Northern New Mexico's first SMART Recovery Program, while simultaneously overseeing large renovations and the purchase of a motel. In 2022, she took a step back only to return two years later to bring the agency back to stability. Since her return in March 2024, she has led the complete reorganization of Pathway's financial management system, the upgrade of all policies and procedures, and is rebuilding relationships with supporters and the community through facts and transparency.

Tyler Taylor is a retired physician and Los Alamos resident. After growing up in Alabama during the Civil Rights era and going to college in Virginia, he got his MD from the University of Alabama School of Medicine and then worked in a small-town family practice in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley for 21 years. In 2000, he, his wife, and daughter moved to Los Alamos, where he practiced for 18 more years.

After retiring, Taylor became intensively involved in healthcare reform efforts in New Mexico, joining the Board of the Health Security Campaign for New Mexicans. For the last 15 months, he and several others have been building the Interfaith Coalition on Homelessness (ICOH), growing from four religious congregations to 13 in Española and Los Alamos over that time. This nonprofit strictly focuses on addressing homelessness and its many causes in the Española Valley. A major focus has been on how to greatly expand treatment of addiction disorders in partnership with multiple facilities in that community. Other efforts are more preventative, or entail directly helping those who are currently unhoused. ICOH is now undertaking eight projects, and has about 75 participants.

Karyl Ann Armbruster



Dena Moscola, Executive Director of Española Pathways Shelter Photo credit: <https://www.coachingandtraining.com/dena/>

LWVLA President Felicia Orth Honored as Public Lawyer of the Year

The Public Lawyer of the Year ceremony will be held on November 14, 2025, at 4 p.m. in the Roundhouse at the Capitol Rotunda. The message from Public Law Board of Directors of the NM State Bar Association reads, "The award for 2025 will be presented to Ms. Felicia Orth. Ms. Orth has had a long and distinguished career in public law, and we are thrilled to present this award to her."

Welcome, New Members!

Richard Honsinger writes:

Marian and I brought our 5 children to Los Alamos in 1969, thinking that this would be a safe, educated community to raise our family and spend the rest of our lives. The medical community welcomed me as an internist with subspecialty boards in allergy/immunology. Marian spent 6 years on the Los Alamos School Board, and that got me interested in politics. I served on the UNM-LA board for 20 years, 5 as chair. And as the Democratic nominee for representative from District 43, I learned that when you lose, you do not really lose. I was appointed to the NM Medicaid Advisory Committee and served 5 years as chair. This led to election to the board of directors and leadership positions in Internal Medicine and Allergy/Immunology societies, and a term on an FDA Advisory Board. Los Alamos residents are ideal research subjects and I have participated in over 40 clinical studies and published as many papers and a text book. My partner, Dr James Ziomek, and I enjoy teaching and I serve as a Clinical Professor in the Department of Medicine, UNM, co-director of the Respiratory Therapy Program at SFCC. Los Alamos has been good to me and I still enjoy a consultative practice in Allergy/Immunology at Los Alamos Medical Center.

Rebecca/Becky (she goes by both) 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.

Sara Ann Mason writes:

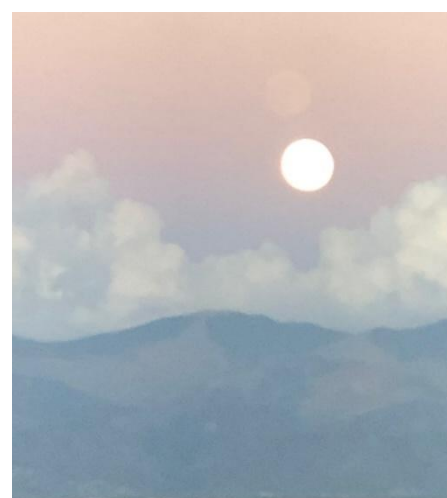
I have been a resident of Los Alamos since 2017 and love connecting with New Mexicans on civic engagement, particularly around climate and energy topics . I publish a small newsletter, *[Hocus Focused](#)*, about how anyone can use their powers for good.

Question about Voter Photo ID Laws

Greetings to all those at the League of Women Voters,

I'm writing because I've been mulling over some of the conversations around voter identification, and I'm hoping you could shed a little more light on your perspective . I understand your organization has a particular stance on the matter, especially concerning the potential impact on certain groups like women, minorities, and military personnel.

From my own daily experiences, it seems like we encounter requests for identification pretty regularly. For instance, I recently went through the process of getting my Real ID driver's license . It involved gathering documents like my birth certificate, marriage license, and even my divorce decree . It felt like a significant process, but I remember thinking how essential it was, especially with



The full moon mesmerized both the candidates and the audience at the League's candidate forum held October 6 in the new Piñon School gym. Photo by Barbara Calef.

Real ID becoming a standard requirement for so many things across the country since 07 May 2025.

It just strikes me how often we present ID in our day-to-day lives – whether it's for something routine like purchasing age-restricted items, or more significant steps like opening a bank account, enrolling in college (even international students needing passports.), or navigating the military . You literally need all your paperwork just to join up, and then you carry a government ID as part of your service.

Given how interwoven identification seems to be with so many aspects of our lives, I'm personally finding it a bit challenging to fully grasp the specific concerns about voter ID requirements, particularly as they relate to access for the groups you champion . I'm genuinely interested in understanding the nuances of your position more deeply . Could you perhaps elaborate on the specific hurdles or challenges that lead to concerns about identification requirements for voting, especially for these communities?

I truly appreciate you taking the time to help me better comprehend this important issue . Thank you so much.

Delia Cruz-Murphy

LWV's Stance on Voter Photo ID Laws

Delia Cruz-Murphy (*Los Alamos Reporter* and *Los Alamos Daily Post*, 10/18/2025) posed two valid and timely questions to the League of Women Voters: What is the League's position regarding any requirement that a voter show proof of citizenship before casting a vote, and why does the League feel that such a requirement would be problematic?

The League of Women Voters supports free, fair, and accessible elections for all eligible Americans, and we oppose efforts to create barriers that block citizens from fully participating in our democracy. We believe it is wrong to pass laws that deny eligible American voters an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy.

A significant part of the population is not applying for a Real ID driver license because they do not have plans to board a plane or enter a federal facility. Nor do they open bank accounts. Some do not even have a birth certificate. Nonetheless, they have the right to vote.

Photo IDs aren't as common as many people assume. According to a 2023 survey, nearly 21 million voting-age U.S. citizens do not have a current (non-expired) driver's license. That includes nearly 15 million people who do not have a license at all. In addition, about 29 million have a license, but it does not have both their current address and current name (e.g., for a recently married woman).

Elderly and low-income voters may not have the time, financial resources, or mobility to obtain the necessary identification, and rural voters may face significant barriers to obtaining the necessary documentation due to their geographic isolation. Further, many rural and Native Americans born at home or on reservations and tribal lands lack the mandated paperwork needed to obtain a government-issued ID that fits the legal requirements to vote in some states.

We thank Ms. Cruz-Murphy for her careful thinking about the Voter ID issue and for asking these questions, which likely have also occurred to others. We are grateful for the opportunity to explain the League's rationale for its position.

Felicia Orth

See [*Orth: LWV's Stance On Voter Photo ID Laws ; LWV's Stance On Voter Photo ID Laws – Los Alamos Reporter.*](#)

President's Message: A Victory in Court

Earlier this month, the LWV Board had an opportunity to explain in a Letter to the Editor of both local papers our practical reasons for opposing requirements that a voter show government-issued proof of U.S. citizenship before casting a vote. We might have added that the attempt to impose that requirement was being pursued in contravention of the U.S. Constitution.

The Constitution gives the president no authority to regulate any aspect of elections. It is the states and the legislative branch that decide what election rules shall be, and President Trump's March 2025 Executive Order calling on the Election Assistance Commission to require proof, recording, and verification of citizenship, among other things, immediately faced legal challenges for executive overreach. In April and in June, two federal judges blocked much of the Order, writing that the states and other parties who had sued to stop it were likely to be able to show that the Order exceeded the President's authority and risked disenfranchising some of the electorate.

On October 31, Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly of the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia issued a clear 81-page opinion (gov.uscourts.dcd.279032.218.0_1.pdf) finding that the Order violated the Constitutional separation of powers: "The Court pauses to note a conspicuous absence from the legal and historical context thus far provided [regarding elections]....The states have initial authority to regulate elections. Congress has supervisory authority over those regulations. The President does not feature at all."

The three lawsuits brought by voting rights groups to challenge the Order included the U.S. League of Women Voters Education Fund. There are many other voter suppression efforts to challenge; this week we get to celebrate a victory.

Felicia Orth



Registering voters is an important League activity. Here Elaine Deschamp and Leslie Wallstrom answer questions and register voters at the Farmers Market. Photo by Barbara Calef.

Observer Corps Report — County Council – October 7

Bicycle Park Study, Adopt-a-Trail Program, Brewer Arena Improvement Project, Tourism Marketing

The 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.

Bicycle Park Study

Councilors expressed support for the concept of a bicycle park facility in Los Alamos County as proposed by a citizen group.

The Bicycle Park Working Group (BPWG) was formed a year ago by the Parks and Recreation Board (PRB). Jerry Cowan, PRB liaison to the working group, said the group was tasked with finding viable locations in the County for a bike park.

BPWG members Kyle Dickman and Nathan Maier presented the study results. They emphasized the large and growing community of mountain bikers. They pointed out that,

given the difficult nature of trails in Los Alamos, a bike park would offer a safe, dedicated place for young and other riders to develop skills. Typically, such facilities include a pump track, dirt jump, progression drops and a flow trail.

The working group evaluated the suitability of four locations for the bike park: North Mesa Park, Overlook Park, Piñon Park, and the former site of the old wastewater treatment facility in Pueblo Canyon (accessed from Olive St.). A community survey received 270 responses, many from non-bikers. Eighty-five percent of survey respondents supported including a bike park in the North Mesa Park Master Plan being prepared by the Community Services Department.

The presenters noted how BPWG proactively engaged stakeholders, reaching out to user groups with which bicyclists had had conflicts in the past. They highlighted that the group prioritized consultation with the equestrian community to ensure that concerns about bike-horse interactions were addressed so that most stable owners would support the bike park proposal.

Dickman and Maier estimated that constructing a 3- to 5-acre bike facility in North Mesa Park would cost about \$500K. They listed several grant opportunities that could help fund such a facility. They also urged early-phase construction of the bike park when the North Mesa Master Plan is implemented.

Adopt-a-Trail Program

Councilors expressed support for the concept of an Adopt-a-Trail program in Los Alamos County as proposed by a citizen group.

The Open Space Working Group (OSWG) was established by the Parks and Recreation Board (PRB) in July 2024, superseding the Open Space Advisory Subcommittee with a new structure and specific tasks.

OSWG member Celeste Raffin presented a proposal for a revitalized Adopt-a-Trail initiative for volunteers to assist the Parks and Open Space Division with trail and open space maintenance.

Raffin outlined the concept of an online “shopping” site where community members

could select small-scale projects that could be completed within the volunteer’s schedule. The proposed program would start with simple tasks such as trash pickup, pruning vegetation along trails, and assessing trail maintenance needs.

Raffin suggested that the program would need a designated staff coordinator and a specifically developed app for reporting assessments and completed projects.

Council supported the conceptual plan but stated they would need to see more details before approving funds for its implementation.

Updated Trails and Open Space Management Plan

Sites Southwest consultant Allison Long provided a brief overview of the updated Los Alamos County Trails and Open Space Management Plan . Council took no action.

Los Alamos County contracted with Sites Southwest Consultants in 2024 to review several existing plans that provided guidance for trails and open space management, gather feedback from the community, and develop a single, comprehensive Open Space and Trails Management Plan.

The goal of the updated plan was to identify current services, opportunities, and needs, while also consolidating and updating relevant planning documents. As part of this effort, Sites Southwest worked to reconcile overlapping recommendations, resolve conflicts, and incorporate best practices.

The updated Open Space and Trails Management Plan includes recommendations to guide the future development, maintenance, and management of the County’s open space and trail systems . It identifies strategies to meet the diverse needs of all users, with a focus on improving accessibility and enhancing recreational opportunities.

Currently, the cost of implementing the plan is uncertain . Staff will implement the strategies outlined in the plan as recommended and submit a budget request for funding to address both short-term and long-term needs.

At Council's upcoming meeting on October 28, the Community Services Department will return with a request to Council to adopt the final plan.

Brewer Arena Improvement Project

Voting 6–0, with Councilor Havemann absent, Council decided not to approve the proposed service agreement with All-Rite Construction Inc. for Brewer Arena improvements, in the amount of about \$1.9M, nor to establish a project budget of about \$2.7M.

Instead, the Council instructed staff to send the item to the Parks and Recreation Board for further evaluation and coordination with the stable owners working group for a recommendation and re-routing to Council when a recommendation has been made.

This item had been on Council's Consent Agenda but was pulled to allow for more discussion.

Unsafe Conditions at Brewer Arena

Community Service Department Director Cory Styron said that Brewer Arena is over 20 years old and requires upgrades to meet current building code, including accessibility, functionality, and seating capacity requirements.

Styron Detailed the Project's History

In the Spring of 2024, the County hired Wilson and Company Inc, an on-call engineering and architectural consultant, to perform a facility condition assessment. During the assessment, the company found evidence of structural damage in the pavilion, grandstand, and announcer's box. The company recommended replacement. -It also determined that parking areas, pedestrian circulation routes, and restroom facilities required upgrades to meet current accessibility standards.

Proposed Improvements

In response to the consultant's findings, County staff promptly arranged for the demolition of the deficient pavilion and

grandstand structures, which was completed in December 2024. Temporary bleachers were used for the Summer 2025 rodeo. Concurrently, Wilson and Company initiated the design of renovations and accessibility improvements for the Brewer Arena. The scope of design included:

- a new pavilion, grandstand with 700-seat capacity, and press box,
- renovation of the restroom to be ADA-compliant,
- upgrades to the pedestrian circulation paths and accessible parking, and
- renovation to the walkways leading to the press box to minimize contact with the animals in the pens.

Styron said that the increased capacity of the grandstand was based on data from tracking software, which indicated daily attendance at the annual two-day rodeo event up to about 1000 to 1200 people. Styron said that the 700-seat capacity took into account that many of those people were participants.

At tonight's meeting Styron requested that Council approve an agreement with All-Rite Construction Inc. to undertake the Brewer Arena Improvements. Councilor Reagor commented that the Council's agenda package did not include a copy of the design schematics for the proposed improvements.

Public Comment

Several equestrians and stable owners raised strong objections, not only about the proposed improvements but also the process by which the Brewer Arena plan was developed.

Lisa Reader spoke as a representative of the Stable Owners Association, the Los Alamos Equestrian and Livestock Working Group, and some general taxpayers. "We are all unhappy about this proposal for many reasons," she said.

- Limited involvement of the equestrian community. The equestrians felt they had been largely excluded from the planning process and that many of their comments were ignored.

- Lack of transparency and poor communication. Reader said that, despite repeated requests, County staff would not provide a copy of the final construction plan for comment, nor would they give an idea when the plan would be heard by Council. She said "we were fortunate to have had a sharp-eyed member of the public let us know at 10 a.m. this morning that this was on the agenda this evening, or we would not have had any idea until construction began."
- Oversized grandstand. The plan calls for a grandstand that is approximately double the capacity of the one that was demolished. Reader said, "There is no reason for a 700-seat grandstand for an event that occurs two days a year." She and other equestrians said that County staff repeatedly ignored their request for information on the source of the projected need.
- Severe safety hazards posed to horses by proposed concrete ADA walkways. Reader suggested that crushed gravel pathways could also be ADA-compliant as well as safe for horses.
- No need for plumbed restrooms. Reader said "they are closed half of the year to avoid freezing and require more maintenance. Accessible vault toilets would be much less expensive to build and to maintain."

Reader stated that, "at \$2.7 million, all of us consider that to be rather a colossal waste of money."

Jerry Cowan, Vice Chair of the Parks and Recreation Board (PRB) and liaison to the PRB's Equestrian Livestock Working Group, echoed Reader's dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency and poor public communication. He said he had also requested information from County staff several times about the progress with the Brewer Arena Improvement Project plans and was told that no plans were yet available. So, he was disappointed to learn on the morning of the Council meeting that the plans had actually already been approved and

sent out for a contract for which Council approval was being requested.

Tourism Marketing Services

Council voted unanimously (6–0, Councilor Havemann absent) to approve a contract with Global Vista Technologies, Inc. dba Destination IQ, for Tourism Marketing Services. The three-year contract is not to exceed \$1.48M.

Ellyn Felton, Marketing Specialist in the Community Development Department, explained that the contractor will develop strategies to expand outreach, enhance branding, and strengthen tourism promotion for Los Alamos County.

Felton said that the contract has a base fee of \$413.1K, with additional optional services of up to but not to exceed \$1.07M. Optional services include such activities as social media, influencer management, grant writing and administration, newsletters, website refresh, and on-site staffing for events.

The agreement will be funded out of the Lodgers Tax Fund, with additional funding from the Economic Development Fund, if needed, as approved by Council in the FY26 Budget.

Service Agreements (included in Consent Agenda)

Council voted unanimously (6–0, Councilor Havemann absent) to approve the Consent Agenda. The agenda included the following items:

Climate Action Marketing and Engagement Services

Agreement with Modern Entrepreneur LLC, dba Firebrand Creative, for the purpose of performing climate action marketing and engagement services in an amount not to exceed \$615.9K, for seven-year term.

Working with community stakeholders, County Council, and staff, the Contractor will build and carry out campaigns that inspire residents to recycle more, save energy, conserve water, and choose cleaner transportation. They will use surveys and

outreach to identify motivators and barriers, then create messages, events, social media, and classroom activities that make climate action simple and accessible.

PFAS in Drinking Water

Agreement that authorizes Stag Liuzza, LLC to represent and assist the County in filing a settlement claim in a nationwide lawsuit as a public water supplier to recover damages for remediation of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination in the County's water supply.

PFAS are synthetic chemicals used in various products. The Los Alamos municipal water system is eligible for Phase 2 recovery, and the County may be eligible for approximately \$1.9M. The County will need to conduct specific PFAS testing and submit the results of the tests to the Claims Administrator.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

Observer Corps Report – County Council – October 21

Los Alamos County Health Council, Plastic Bag Research, County Fleet Conversion and Community-Wide EV Charging Plans

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

Los Alamos County Health Council

Jessica Strong, Social Services Division Director, and Lisa Hampton, Chair of County Health Council, provided updates on the County Health Council's 2025 work plan, which includes three main initiatives:

- address priority areas for community health outreach from the Comprehensive Health Plan;
- participate in discussions toward establishing a Community Health Action Center; and
- complete deliverables required for the NM Department of Health (DOH) work plan.

Community Health Outreach and Crisis Response

Strong reported that the Health Council is collaborating with the Los Alamos Community Foundation by participating in a suicide prevention training initiative. This collaboration involves expanding the Health Council's efforts to include other community members, working closely with first responders such as the police, and supporting broader suicide prevention strategies being led by the Community Foundation.

The Council is also working to expand the availability of peer support options through Social Services and the courts.

Community Health Action Center

Hampton discussed progress towards the establishment of a Community Health Action Center. A dedicated working group defined the key attributes for a "one-stop shop" for health needs. The group's recommendations were approved by the Health Council in September following public input.

The project has now been handed over to the County's Project Management and Social Services. Next come tasks such as architectural renderings and site selection.

Hampton said that now that the Health Council has completed its part, the next steps depend on the County's follow-through and funding availability.

Deliverables for the Department of Health (DOH) Work Plan

Strong said that the County Health Council submits a work plan to the state to receive funding from DOH. For that funding, the DOH

makes sure that the work plan aligns with the initiatives that are already underway, and that those initiatives meet community needs.

Strong reported that the fiscal year 2026 budget for the DOH contract is \$67,995, with an additional \$40,000 possible for specific initiatives. The DOH work plan includes four initiatives, which overlap those in the Health Council's 2025 Work Plan:

- conduct outreach and education in the community on relevant health-related topics;
- work with regional partners to expand access to mental health and substance use treatment options in response to Senate Bill 3, the Behavioral Health Reform and Investment Act (enacted during the 2025 Legislative Session);
- use closed-loop referral system (Unite Us) to improve coordination of services to individuals in need; and
- implement specific activities towards community suicide prevention and crisis response planning.

Expansion of Social Services

Noting the increased staffing of the Social Services Division, Councilor Ryti asked how the scope of its services has changed over the past few years.

Strong explained that the daily work of social services has changed from simply helping people with Medicaid applications and renewals, applying for SNAP benefits (food stamps) and other benefit programs, to now include helping people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of imminent homelessness, helping get them connected to programs such as housing applications.

She added that Social Services staff are also increasingly being asked to help people with writing resumes and searching for jobs. She explained that "nearly all job searches are online and, for people that aren't so technically savvy, navigating an online application is another thing that we are often helping with in the office."

Social Services also helps get people connected to mental health resources, detox, and rehab facilities.

Strong reported that "one issue that we struggle with and don't have a good answer for is transportation. If you need to get to the new detox center in Española, or you need to go to your annual interview with the income support division in Santa Fe, transportation remains a barrier."

Impact of Federal Funding Cuts

Councilor Ryti asked about local impacts of federal funding cuts. Hampton noted that federal cuts have not affected the County's Social Services Division's budget but that all the clients that they're seeing are suffering greatly. Strong said that they are monitoring what changes may be occurring to SNAP and Social Security applications, for example, during this shutdown.

Plastic Bag Research

Shannon Blair, Chair of the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB), presented the findings of a study on the environmental impacts of plastic bags in New Mexico and Los Alamos. The study was conducted by the Plastic Bag Fee Working Group in response to the Council motion from January 16, 2025:

"Evaluate single-use plastic bags to include factors such as ability to recycle and other alternatives and cost to County to recycle and engagement to include local businesses and other interested parties, emphasizing the need to evaluate single-use plastic bags, including recyclability, cost, and consumer engagement."

Environmental Impacts of Plastic Bags in New Mexico

Blair listed several factors to illustrate the significant and long-lasting environmental impacts of plastic bags:

- Extremely long decomposition time: Single-use plastic bags, which are made from high-density polyethylene (HDPE), take about 1,000 years to degrade and break down into microplastics, which persist in the

environment. In contrast, paper bags and organic cotton degrade in months.

- High usage rate: New Mexicans use an estimated 30 million single-use plastic bags annually.
- Pollution: Plastic bags are the most prevalent waste item in waterways, contributing to both water and terrestrial pollution.
- Harm to wildlife: Microplastics and whole bags threaten animals such as birds and deer, leading to illness and death when ingested.
- Greenhouse gas emissions: A single plastic bag produces about 2.6 kg CO₂e (CO₂ equivalent), 90% of which occurs during its production. This corresponds to the amount of CO₂e produced by an average gas car driven 6.6 miles.
- Recycling challenges: Although technically recyclable, plastic bags are not accepted in curbside recycling, and 80–87% of bags are not recycled, often contaminating other recycling streams. On average, a single-use plastic bag is used for about 14 minutes, said Blair, "so you bag your groceries up, you drive home, you unload your groceries, and then they get thrown away or potentially recycled."

Comparative Environmental Impact of Different Materials

Blair presented a slide comparing the environmental impact of various bag materials, including single-use plastic bags, paper bags, organic cotton, and others.

So which type of bag is better for the environment?

The data in Blair's slide emphasized the complexity of this issue. Reusable bags, regardless of material, have a much higher carbon footprint than thin plastic bags and hence need to be reused many times to reduce their impact to that of a single-use bag. For example, a Danish study estimated that a brown paper bag would need to be reused nine times to reduce its impact to the equivalent of a single-use plastic bag.

The popular cotton tote bag poses an extreme example. Cotton has a large environmental footprint because it is a resource-intensive crop that requires lots of water and uses a substantial amount of pesticides and fertilizers, which introduce nitrates to land and waterways and results in the creation of nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas. An organic cotton tote bag would need to be reused about 2,400 times to reduce its impact to that of a single-use bag.

Plastic Bag Policies in Other New Mexico Municipalities and Counties

Blair reported that, in New Mexico, five municipalities (Las Cruces, Santa Fe, Taos, Silver City, Carlsbad) as well as the counties of Bernalillo and Santa Fe have enacted some form of single-use plastic bag ordinance (either bans or fees). The policies vary by jurisdiction, often depending on local population, types of retail stores, and specific community needs.

These policies generally include bans or fees for single-use plastic bags, with a trend toward using any revenue generated for community education, waste reduction, or sustainability efforts.

- Santa Fe County has an outright ban on single-use plastics, Styrofoam, and straws at all businesses and restaurants, with penalties for non-compliance. There is no fee for paper bags.
- Santa Fe City implemented an ordinance in 2015 banning plastic bags and imposing a fee on paper bags, with significant exemptions (notably restaurants). The paper bag fee is 10 cents, with the proceeds split between the city (9 cents) and the retailer (one cent).
- Las Cruces adopted a similar ordinance in 2022, including many exemptions (restaurants, mom-and-pop stores, SNAP/EBT, nonprofits). Their 10-cent paper bag fee is split, with 5 cents each to the city and retailers/corporations. The ordinance generates about \$190,000 annually.

Plastic Bag Use in Los Alamos

Blair discussed plastic bag use in Los Alamos, estimating that the County uses 3.25 million bags annually, or about 60,000 bags per week.

Both Smith's stores in the County have bag collection systems, but the fate of the collected bags is uncertain. "They are sent to a warehouse, either in Phoenix, Las Vegas or Seattle," said Blair, "and then at that point, it's anyone's guess if they actually get recycled and reused, or if they just get thrown away."

To complicate matters, a store representative cited problems with people putting dirty bags and trash in the recycle drop offs, which defeats the purpose.

Cost of Plastic Bags to the County

Blair examined the cost of plastic bags to the County, focusing on recycling contamination.

The County's recycling contamination rate was 17% during the most recent audit, corresponding to about 266 tons of contaminated waste annually. The County is charged \$46 per ton for recycling contamination, amounting to approximately \$12,000 per year. Although recycling contamination includes more than just plastic bags, bags are the largest source of contamination nationally.

Blair said that in the last State legislative session, House Bill 392, the Single Use Plastic Bag Act, proposed a statewide ban on plastic bags and a 10-cent fee per paper bag, with three cents going to the store, and the remainder going to the municipality or the county, specifically to be used for litter reduction and outreach. They estimated that it could save \$3.8 million per year for recycling processors due to the damage that plastic bags have on recycling materials recovery facilities. Blair explained that "when you have bags, they get kind of stuck in all the wheels, and you have to stop, pull it out, so you're losing revenue."

Conclusions and Next Steps

Blair outlined potential options for Los Alamos: a ban on single-use plastic bags, a fee on paper bags, or a bag reuse program.

A 10-cent fee on paper bags could generate approximately \$325,000 annually for the County, assuming 3.25 million bags are used per year. If one cent per bag goes to the business and nine cents to the County, the County's share would be just under \$300,000 per year.

Blair said the ESB would recommend that the County's share be used to fund sustainability and waste reduction efforts, or to counteract contamination charges. She also emphasized the importance of continued education and outreach to residents and businesses.

Blair concluded her presentation with a request for further guidance from the Council on engaging with the community and businesses regarding potential plastic bag policies, if the Council decides to keep pursuing this issue.

Council Discussion

Councilor Ryti made several comments about the use of plastic bags, acknowledging the complexity of the issue. Referring to Blair's slide about the environmental impacts of different kinds of bag materials, he suggested that such information would be useful to provide to the public so that people could decide for themselves which alternative is better or worse.

Councilor Ryti also questioned the effectiveness of education efforts, which have been underway in the County for ten years, commenting that there was no way to judge the impact without knowing how many bags were used at Smith's stores prior to those efforts.

Councilor Havemann expressed strong support for a plastic bag ban or fee. She observed that, when one added up the population of all the municipalities in New Mexico that have a ban or a fee, that represents over half the state's population. "People think the people in those communities

are getting along just fine," she said. "Same thing when you visit Colorado, same thing in California . Same thing if you're in Spain or France, etc., if we were to go that route."

Public Comment

Jody Benson spoke in support of a high enough bag fee or a ban, emphasizing the need for education and reduced plastic bag use. Local resident James Wernicke expressed his opposition to a ban, but would support a fee to discourage excessive plastic bag use."

Council thanked Blair for her presentation but took no action.

County Fleet Conversion and Community-wide EV Charging Plans

An update on plans to transition the County's fleet to zero-emission vehicles and to expand the public EV charging infrastructure was provided by Stantec project team members Josh Schacht, Analay Castillo, and Greg Wallingford.

The plans were initiatives of the County Council. The project, which was launched in March 2025, is being led by Stantec in collaboration with County staff, including County Fleet Manager Pete Mondragon, Mariano Valdez from the Department of Public Utilities, and Sustainability Manager Angelica Gurule.

Schacht introduced the two-part project, explaining that the 2025 Fleet Conversion Plan aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from County fleet vehicles while the Community-Wide EV Charging Plan focuses on increasing public access to charging facilities.

Schacht said that one of the key drivers for the project is the New Mexico Clean Car Rule, which is being phased in over several years. It mandates that manufacturers deliver for sale an increasing number of low- and zero-emission cars and trucks. Starting with Model Year 2027, 43% of new light-duty vehicles delivered to the state must comply with the rule. Ending with Model Year 2032, the rule

ensures that over 80% of new vehicles meet the standard.

"This project is largely about closing the gap between where the County is now and where it needs to be," said Schacht. He estimates that there are currently 284 battery electric vehicles and 130 plug-in (hybrid) electric vehicles on the road in the County, which is equivalent to 30 EVs per 1000 people. Consequently, meeting the goals of the Clean Car Rule will require significant adoption of EVs in the County.

Fleet Conversion Plan

Castillo outlined the steps taken to assess the conversion for the County fleet to zero-emission vehicles:

- interview staff from various County departments to understand conditions of the fleet, their operations, their maintenance, and how and where the vehicles are used;
- understand how those operations translate to charging needs and the timing of when potential replacement electric vehicles would become available; and
- assess capital and operating costs, acknowledging that electric vehicles are more expensive and will require more infrastructure.

Castillo noted that a lot of zero-emission vehicles may be equivalent but that not all of them can meet requirements for the site-specific uses that the County fleet needs.

Castillo said that the conversion plan will include anticipated power capacities needed at the different sites.

The final plan will have a detailed year-by-year, vehicle ID by vehicle ID, replacement schedule designed to meet operational needs . It will take into account market availability and infrastructure availability. It will serve as the basis for predicting greenhouse gas emissions and estimating capital investment needs.

Community-wide EV Charging Plan: Suitable Locations for EV Chargers

Schacht introduced the community-wide EV charging plan with a description of the types of information considered to identify suitable locations for public EV chargers.

The analysis focused on three areas:

- Demand is determined by the level of EV adoption in the community. Large scale adoption is limited by what the community feels are barriers, most commonly range anxiety. Other barriers include high purchase costs, reliability concerns, and limited charging access at home or on errands.
- Suitability includes concerns such as land use, zoning, and utility infrastructure.
- The mapping process began with a public visioning session in May 2025 and a community survey that received over 500 responses. This feedback was used to map all the community's preferred locations.

Schacht then described the determination of the most suitable locations:

- Where do people park their EVs? Because most people park them at home, the team used population density to see where home charging would be happening and understand the impact on the County's electrical grid.
- Where do people drive their EVs? Using a tool called Replica, the team mapped the most common destinations for trips in EVs because where people are driving is where people are going to need to charge.

Community-wide EV Charging Plan: Optimal Locations for EV Chargers

Schacht presented four scenarios considered for optimizing public charging locations and for estimating the distribution and magnitude of power demands throughout the County:

- At-home charging use was forecasted based on population density.

- County-owned charging. Downtown areas were prioritized. The public suggested places such as libraries, visitor centers, recreational facilities, and parks as preferred locations.
- Shared level 2 charging. (Level 2 is the usual public charger, faster than home, but slower than the fast chargers at some traveler-friendly locations.) Multi-family housing and commercial areas were prioritized. Because this scenario considered only privately-owned land, Castillo suggested that the County might want to explore incentives or other mechanisms to encourage property owners to install shared level 2 chargers.
- Fast charging. EV traffic volumes and feeder capacities were weighted highly in this scenario. Public comments expressed the need for more fast chargers near grocery stores, dining, and shopping.

Schacht said that analysis of these results will not only inform the specific locations where chargers should be installed, but will reveal future energy needs and forecast electrical capacity needs at specific County feeders.

Next Steps

Schacht said that the final draft plan will be submitted for County staff review and then presented to the County Council, Board of Public Utilities, and Environmental Sustainability Board.

Gurule clarified that the scope of the study excludes EV charging infrastructures at Los Alamos Public Schools and LANL facilities.

Public Comment

During public comment, local developer Phil Gursky pointed out to Council the financial impacts of providing electric infrastructure for new subdivisions. Gursky said that developers building new, fully electric subdivisions—including EV chargers in every house—face much higher infrastructure requirements, which will have a noticeable impact on housing affordability. He estimated that the final sale price of a new home could rise by \$15,000–\$20,000.

Gursky said that developers accept that fully electric housing is needed to meet the County's climate action goals. However, he stressed the importance of understanding that it will have an impact on the County's goals for affordable housing.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

Observer Corps Report – County Council – October 28

Artificial Turf Feasibility Study, Gross Receipts Tax Increase, Open Space and Trails Management Plan

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

Artificial Turf Feasibility Study

Council heard a presentation on the draft Artificial Turf Feasibility Study commissioned by the Community Services Department. No action was taken since this agenda item will return to Council in mid-November.

Presenters emphasized that the study's purpose was only to guide future planning and decision-making.

Study Purpose and Scope

Anya Pastushevskaya, with the consulting firm NV5, explained that the study was commissioned due to increasing demand for high-quality, multi-use athletic fields at North Mesa Sports Complex and Overlook Park. Key study goals included improving safety, addressing maintenance challenges, and extending field usability through artificial turf installation, where appropriate.

Pastushevskaya noted that, although the study was focused on the feasibility of utilizing artificial turf at North Mesa and Overlook Park, its scope covered a broad range of related

topics, including ADA-compliant walkways and facilities, pedestrian and vehicular access, lighting maintenance and management, renewable energy use, field and park amenities, field realignment, and reorientation options.

Community Involvement

Multiple types of community feedback showed mixed opinions on natural grass versus artificial turf. Survey results showed 67% favored installing artificial turf, 23% were opposed, and 10% were unsure.

Turf System Comparisons

Highlights of comparing artificial versus natural turf showed that

- Artificial turf can be used year-round while natural grass has limited use in freezing or wet conditions.
- Artificial turf requires no rest between games.
- Artificial turf may have high embodied carbon. Natural turf supports green goals but requires high water use and application of pesticides and fertilizers. Fields with natural grass require more resting time than they currently get.
- Natural turf maintenance is more labor-intensive, exceeding current staff capacity.
- Gophers on natural turf pose safety hazards for athletes and pest management challenges to County staff.

Specific community concerns included PFAS in artificial turf, microplastics in the environment, recyclability and life cycle of the materials, and increased surface temperatures.

Cost Estimates

After listing many required and optional variations for both parks, the base costs were \$20M for the North Mesa Sports Complex and \$23M for Overlook Park.

Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) Increase

Voting 6–1, with Councilor Reagor in opposition, Council approved ordinances to

increase the Municipal and County Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) by 0.625%, to become effective by July 1, 2026.

Background

Helen Perraglio recapped her presentation from Council's meeting on 9/30/2025. GRT makes up 72% of the revenue for the County's General Fund, and property taxes make up about 8%. However, the 14% decline in GRT revenue in FY 25, corresponding to about \$13M, was more than projected. The decline is expected to continue in FY 26. Without an increased GRT, Perraglio projected unsustainable deficits of roughly \$16M to \$20M, beginning in FY 27 and worsening throughout the 10-year financial projection.

Perraglio said the proposed 0.625% GRT is expected to generate approximately \$17M annually and would provide for a positive long-range financial projection over the next 10 years of operations.

Impact of Not Adopting the Increment

Perraglio said that, without the increment, immediate budget cuts would be required. She pointed out that the increment is crucial for maintaining community services, public safety, and funding for schools, affordable housing, and economic development. The proposed increment ensures the ability to provide regional strategic partnership support, including \$2.5M in recurring support to regional neighbors.

Perraglio said that not approving the GRT increase would also affect the County's bond rating, preventing it from obtaining the most favorable interest rates for new bonds. The increase is also necessary to fund the debt service for the \$75M in planned capital improvement loans, which includes the proposed \$40M bond for community broadband.

Public Comments

Members of the public raised several objections to the tax increase, calling it regressive and criticizing the impact on small businesses. In a Chamber of Commerce

survey, 73% of business owners opposed the measure. The County's spending priorities were also questioned.

A resident expressed concern that the GRT increase might negatively impact LANL's budget. She noted that LANL has already faced significant budget cuts and may be facing a shutdown.

Others supported the tax increase, emphasizing the County's fiscal responsibility and the need for critical infrastructure projects. A business owner stated that it would not affect her business and viewed the increase as necessary to fund community services.

Council Discussion

Most of the councilors agreed with Perraglio's arguments for supporting the tax increase;

They also cited:

- the need for financial stability in light of the shutdown and other unforeseen impacts of the changing federal landscape, and
- the need to avoid the risk of going into the red. Councilor Neal-Clinton commented, "I can imagine that if we were to go into the negative, knowing the constituency the way that I do, you all would be out of your minds."

Councilor Reagor opposed the tax increase, arguing for better planning and management of the County's finances. He felt that the increased GRT revenue collected from construction activities during the Lab's explosive growth should have been treated as a one-time windfall to be used only for capital projects and other one-time expenses. He said that, instead, the temporarily increased GRT revenue "has gone on the operating budget. So, everything is in the budget but the kitchen sink, and now the kitchen sink is probably in the budget too."

He proposed that consideration of a GRT increase be put off, and that the County do a better job planning its operational budget. "We were doing just fine a few years ago with much smaller budgets, and I think we can figure it out."

Open Space and Trails Management Plan

Council voted unanimously to adopt the Los Alamos County Open Space and Trails Management Plan.

The draft Plan was formally introduced to the Los Alamos County Council at its meeting on October 7, when Sites Southwest consultants delivered a brief presentation.

At this meeting Parks Superintendent Wendy Parker noted that a few changes had been made to the Plan in response to an email from Councilor Cull.

Staff will submit funding requests during future budget periods to implement the Plan's recommendations.

Other Agenda Items

- **Bond Ordinance.** An ordinance was introduced to authorize issuance of \$40M GRT Improvement Revenue Bonds for the purpose of acquiring, extending, enlarging, repairing, and otherwise improving a Broadband Communications System and other public buildings, facilities, and infrastructure. A Public Hearing on the

ordinance is scheduled for November 18, 2025.

- **Landfill Feasibility Study.** Danielle Duran, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, reported that a potential property for a new regional landfill is being evaluated. The property is owned by the city of Española.
- **Jemez Mountain Wildfire Protection Project.** Duran said that FEMA had "technically" approved the County's grant application for the Jemez Mountain Wildfire Protection Project. However, there is now a new requirement that the Cabinet Secretaries sign off on large grant applications. "So, this is sitting on Secretary Noem's desk," said Duran, "and hopefully they'll see how critical our project is to ensure that the Laboratory and the people of Los Alamos stay safe."
- **Radar Speed Signs.** Duran reported that the County is purchasing radar speed signs in order to improve traffic safety in the corridor as part of the Los Alamos Police Department's partnership with the Pueblo of San Ildefonso.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

October Lunch with a Leader: Danielle Prokop on the Current State of Journalism

Danielle Prokop, who grew up in Los Alamos, greeted her parents and some of her former teachers and thanked the League for its work as a civic organization. She gave an impassioned talk about what journalism means in this time.

Prokop told the group that her career started in Albuquerque when she worked on the UNM student newspaper, the *Daily Lobo*. There, she "got radicalized and learned what was important about journalism: compassion, taking confusing or purposely obscure things and translating them for the public, and making a difference." Prokop remarked on the value of college newspapers in training journalists, serving as a place to make mistakes and develop thinking skills. She also said that journalism is a very stressful job. Journalists are in the top ten at risk for suicide! The burnout is real.



Danielle Prokop at Lunch with a Leader. Photo by Maire O'Neill.

The most challenging aspect of journalism right now is that “there are not enough people to do it and there are not enough people who want it to be done.” There are more layoffs for journalists than for coal miners because many local newspapers have “shuttered.” Instead of being sources for local news, there are “ghost newspapers” like the one in Ruidoso where no one has worked since 2019, but which continues to function, making money from legal announcements and ads.

Journalism is changing because information is power, so people are working to dismantle libraries, civic organizations, NGOs, newspapers. Large companies are controlling the media, obscuring information, and spinning stories. We need structural change to deal with the content that sucks our time and attention.

Prokop said there is a direct correlation between the amount of corruption in small towns and a town’s lack of a newspaper, giving as an example a midwestern town where more candidates started running for office when journalists began reporting on life there. One cannot address the solutions without knowing about the issues. “Having information empowers you to participate in civic life.”

Prokop is employed by States Newsroom, which started in 2022 covering capital statehouses, and is now “the nation’s largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.” Many of her stories are published in *Source New Mexico*, and her work, covering state government and the environment, has been featured in more than 200 papers in the U.S. and Mexico.

She especially enjoys writing about the Rio Grande. She traveled 700 miles along the river to report on the struggles surrounding it and the communities that rely on it. She is also very interested in writing about the climate and health impacts on New Mexicans. “New Mexico is on the bleeding edge of climate change, one of the fastest warming states in the contiguous 48.”

Prokop said that “we the public must hold the people in power accountable.” She asks that we continue to work together to get people to want to live in a society that will be better for them, to help to demand that we live in a fact-based world.

Barbara Calef



Appreciative audience at Lunch with a Leader. Photo by Maire O'Neill

Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies

Tickler Report

Tentative Council Agenda Items as of October 24, 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.]

- **2026 Council Strategic Leadership Plan**
 - 11/04/25. Discussion and possible action.
- **FY2027 Budget Guidance**
 - 11/18/25 meeting. Discussion and possible action.
- **Public Works and Department of Public Utilities – Lessons Learned on Recent Projects**
 - 11/18/25 meeting. Presentation. No action requested.
- **Artificial Turf Study**
 - 11/18/25 meeting. Discussion and possible action.
- **Ordinance authorizing issuance of GRT Improvement Revenue Bonds**
 - 11/18/25 meeting. Public hearing and possible action.

eComment Tool for Council meetings:

County staff has fixed the eComment tool, which we reported broken in September. (There is now one meeting marked with eComment.)

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 October 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
○ 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	0
○ 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	0
○ No terms ending soon	
▪ Planning and Zoning Commission	0
○ No terms ending soon	
▪ Transportation Board	0
○ 4 terms ending February 28, 2026	

Totals: 3 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> .



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.

Rev. 11/5/25

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