

LWW LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®] OF LOS ALAMOS

UPDATE

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

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

Volume 78, Number 10, February 2026

President: Felicia Orth [orthf\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:orthf(at)yahoo.com)
Newsletter Editor: Barbara Calef [bfcalef\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:bfcalef(at)gmail.com)
Newsletter Publisher: Robert Williams [rawbits2\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:rawbits2(at)gmail.com)

Calendar

February 9	Fund Drive Party, 2 p.m., 1577 Camino Medio
February 19	Lunch with a Leader, Garrett VeneKlasen, 11:45
February 24	Health Care Forum, SALA, 6:30-9 p.m.
February 26	Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon

February Lunch with a Leader: Garrett VeneKlasen

Our next Lunch with a Leader will be on February 19 at 11:45 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall of the Unitarian Church. Our leader will be Garrett VeneKlasen, who will talk about the impact of actions by the current federal administration on our public lands in New Mexico and other conservation-related issues.

VeneKlasen was a candidate for NM Commissioner of Public Lands in 2018. Before running for office, he was Executive Director of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. He later worked as a political advocacy strategist for Conservation Voters of New Mexico and also served as the Southwest Director of Trout Unlimited's Sportsmen's Project as well as their Public Lands Coordinator. He founded the New Mexico Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. Currently, he is New Mexico Wild's Northern Conservation Director.

VeneKlasen has fought for federal and state funding for native wildlife, stricter regulation of off-highway vehicles on public lands, higher state water quality standards, stricter regulation on mineral development, and enhanced conservation and protection of threatened and endangered species.



*Garrett VeneKlasen, New Mexico
Wild's Northern Conservation Director*

Karyl Ann Armbruster

Statement from LWVUS on Federal Immigration Enforcement and the Erosion of Constitutional Rights

January 26, 2026

WASHINGTON, DC — The League of Women Voters of the United States issued the following statement in response to the continued escalation of federal military activity in Minnesota from federal immigration officials:

“The League of Women Voters condemns the escalating actions by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that put people at risk, deny individuals their constitutional rights, and undermine the democratic values meant to protect us all.

“We are horrified by federal immigration enforcement operations that deliberately infringe upon First Amendment rights to assemble and dissent. The use of intimidation, surveillance, and deadly force against lawful protestors is not public safety—it is repression. The use of lethal force against people exercising their constitutional rights is unacceptable and must be fully investigated. These fatalities, followed by false narratives designed to obscure the truth and impede oversight, represent a historic abuse of power we’ve never seen as a country. Democracy cannot endure when its government uses violence to silence dissent and evade accountability.

“The League of Women Voters will continue to organize, speak out, and act to ensure no agency is above the law. We call on Congress to investigate these actions and require accountability measures on the Department of Homeland Security. ICE and other federal immigration officials must cooperate with the appropriate level of law enforcement when civilians are hurt or killed and face accountability when they fail to comply. The League will continue to mount a unified response that defends constitutional rights, protects civic participation, and demands accountability for abuses of power.

“We will continue our partnership with LULAC, Common Cause, and additional partners to hold ICE accountable and amplify our concerns on its lack of transparency, accountability, and constitutional compliance.

“The League of Women Voters reaffirms that the rights outlined in the Constitution belong to all people, without exception. We will not accept policies or practices that suppress civic participation, weaponize enforcement, or undermine fundamental rights and human dignity.”

President’s Message: Laura Paskus Warns of the Destruction of Our Environment

The 2026 LWVNM Legislative Reception was held on January 29 at La Fonda in Santa Fe. LWVNM President Hannah Burling introduced Laura Paskus, a journalist in New Mexico who focuses on environmental issues. She is the author of At the Precipice: New Mexico’s Changing Climate, and editor of Water Bodies: Love Letters to the Most Abundant Substance on Earth. Ms. Paskus teaches at the University of New Mexico. Her newest project is on New Mexico’s rivers and their wild and healthy future.

Paskus began her talk with the premise that we live in challenging days and times. Notwithstanding our differences, it is important to come together. We need to talk about climate change and the fact that water crises are connected with greenhouse gas emissions and greed. We see the drying of the Rio Grande and that we are also using more groundwater than is sustainable. We are contaminating surface and ground water with pollutants.

The legislature could be doing more to protect it. A lot of bills have been introduced regarding water, many bipartisan. Gov. Richardson declared 2007 “the year of water.” But when Ms. Paskus, as a journalist, pushed the conversation around cutting greenhouse gas emissions, she was reminded that we are just New Mexico and cannot significantly affect the world. Gov. Martinez then cut the climate and emissions programs that had been adopted, setting us back decades.



Laura Paskus and LWVNM President Hannah Burling. Photo by Felicia Orth

The Permian Basin is now being called a climate bomb. Gov. Lujan Grisham understands very well the impact of climate change and has said many of the right things about warming and water. But now in 2026 Sen. Stewart is still trying to pass Senate Bill 18, the Clear Horizons Act, which would codify much of what is needed. Sen. Steinborn’s SB 39 on microgrid oversight may or may not make the call. There is money in the budget for river stewardship, the Strategic Water Reserve, the Acequia Bureau, aquifer monitoring for the Water Data Act, and tribal settlements.

None of this is enough. Year after year, the legislators return home after the funding falls through the cracks and we all share a sense of doom. Ms. Paskus continued: 2025 was the third warmest year in 176 years. Ninety-nine percent of New Mexico is experiencing drought. More than 50% is experiencing severe drought. We are also facing continued La Niña conditions, and reservoir numbers are rough: Elephant Butte Lake is 10% full. Other New Mexico lakes are 7-12% full. Seventy-one percent of the reservoir storage that existed in 2002 was gone by 2022. We need to be nervous about these numbers and let our legislators know that we are concerned. Warming and aridity are accelerating.

Ms. Paskus acknowledged that her statements portray a grim vision of the future. None of our current conditions should be a surprise. It is not too late to dedicate ourselves to a climate change future in which New Mexico and its people and ecosystem will thrive.

Hannah Burling closed by thanking Ms. Paskus. She also thanked the legislators in attendance for their work, including Sen. Natalie Figueroa, Sen. Harold Pope, Sen. William Soules, Rep. Matthew McQueen, Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena, Rep. Pamela Herndon, Rep. Diane Torres-Velásquez, and Rep. Tara Lujan.

Felicia Orth

Developing Questions for the June 2026 Primary Ballot

As you know, the League prepares and distributes a Voter Guide for elections. The Voter Guide presents the timelines for voting and the candidates and ballot initiatives that are on the ballot. Our local League is responsible for preparing and distributing questions for the candidates to answer – and these answers are presented in the Voter Guide. Our Los Alamos League is responsible for publishing a printed copy of the Voter Guide and posting this information to Vote411 on the internet.

To include more members of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos (LWVLA), we invite members to participate in developing questions for the candidates. The June 2024 primary ballot includes the following offices:

- Los Alamos County Council (4 positions)
- Los Alamos County Assessor
- Los Alamos Municipal Court Judge
- Los Alamos Probate Judge
- State Senator District 6
- Los Alamos County Sheriff
- State Representative District 43

We will develop two to four questions for each office. The ballot also includes First Judicial District Attorney and Public Education Commission District 4. However, the process for developing questions for these offices has not been established (as of January 22).

Participants will be asked to read materials related to the offices, and, in addition, may conduct interviews with knowledgeable people. Also, the League has guidelines for how to ask unbiased questions. We anticipate that there will be three team meetings and 10-20 hours of work outside meetings.

We will have a kick-off meeting on Thursday, February 5 to begin the process of developing questions for the Voter Guide. We will submit our recommendations to the LWVLA Board on March 19 for their final decisions on March 26.

If you would like to participate, email Jean Dewart at jeandewart7@gmail.com. It is possible that the newsletter is reaching you after the kickoff on February 5 — but, if you are interested, please contact Jean and we will add you to the work!

Jean Dewart

Annual Fund Drive Party on Tuesday, February 9

Every year we gather for the annual Fund Drive Party where we stuff envelopes with a copy of a letter asking non-member residents of the community to make donations to the League. This is an opportunity to share snacks, catch up on local news, and have fun getting to know fellow League members. Ellen Mills will host at her lovely home at 1577 Camino Medio on North Mesa. We'll meet at 2 p.m.

These fund-raising letters are sent to Friends of the League, who have supported our work over the years. We are glad to have suggestions for additional people who might wish to support us. So, having our League's newer members is always helpful.

Please join us!

Health Care Forum!

Our Health, Our Home: The Changing Health Care Landscape in Northern New Mexico

The Los Alamos Community Foundation, in partnership with the Los Alamos League of Women Voters and Anchorum Health Foundation, will host a community roundtable discussion featuring local medical experts on the current state of health care issues in Northern New Mexico.

The event will take place at the **SALA Los Alamos Event Center**, 2551 Central Avenue, on **Tuesday, Feb. 24, from 6:30 to 9 pm**.



Many residents have experienced first-hand how access to health care in our region is increasingly at risk. Health care systems nationwide are undergoing seismic economic shifts, forcing hospitals and clinics to make difficult decisions — downsizing, eliminating services, or even considering closure. These challenges are especially acute in rural communities across Northern New Mexico.

The New Mexico legislature is wrestling with many of these issues right now, including medical practice compacts with other states, the high cost of medical malpractice insurance, decreases in funding for Medicaid, etc.

Invited panelists will explore why physical and mental health outcomes for New Mexicans have worsened in recent years, despite billions of dollars in federal and state health care investments. The discussion will also highlight local innovations, community-based solutions, and opportunities to build a healthier future for the region.

“The Los Alamos League of Women Voters encourages every citizen to understand current issues affecting our state and various policy solutions proposed by our elected leaders,” said Leslie Wallstrom, League Board member. “One way to learn more is to attend this forum and gain a better understanding of some of our healthcare challenges.”

Panelists include:

- **Dr. Madhavi Garimella**, Internal Medicine and Endocrinology, Medical Associates of Northern New Mexico, Los Alamos, NM
- **Dr. Eric Ketcham**, Emergency Physician and Addiction Specialist, Presbyterian Healthcare Services, Española, NM
- **Lillian Montoya**, President & CEO, CHRISTUS St. Vincent Health Systems, Santa Fe, NM
- **Brenda Romero**, CEO of Presbyterian Española Hospital, Española, NM

Members of the audience will have the opportunity to submit short questions to the facilitator, who will pass them to the speakers as time allows.

Food for this free event is being catered by El Parasol Restaurant.

Event Sponsors:

- The Los Alamos League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy.
- The Anchorum Health Foundation is dedicated to improving the conditions that have the greatest influence on the health of communities and people in our region. It commits its resources to strengthening community-based partners tackling critical local issues.
- The Los Alamos Community Foundation works to build enduring philanthropy to empower our community's nonprofit organizations, some of which focus on local health and wellness initiatives.

Leslie Wallstrom

Observer Corps Report — County Council – January 6

State of the County; UbiQD's LEDA Application; Community Broadband Network Construction; Council Chair and Vice Chair for 2026

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

State of the County Presentation

Council Chair Theresa Cull presented the Los Alamos County 2025 State of the County report. The report highlights key accomplishments and priorities from the past year.

Challenges and Accomplishments in 2025

Chair Cull noted that 2025 was a year marked by uncertainty and external challenges, largely driven by federal government changes and economic pressures beyond local control. The County faced higher operational costs, delays in capital projects, an unfulfilled FEMA funding commitment, and a significant reduction in gross receipts tax revenues due to changes at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). In addition, the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history disrupted federal operations, furloughed employees, and curtailed access to local national parks for more than a month.

Despite these challenges, the County made substantial progress across all areas of its Strategic Leadership Plan. Some of the County's accomplishments highlighted by Chair Cull are summarized below.

Local Business and Economic Vitality

Council established a Small Business Working Group to collaborate with local businesses and the Local Business Coalition.

This effort resulted in an action plan to address business challenges.

The County implemented the Small Retail Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) process, creating new tools to support small businesses. The Council also adopted the East Downtown Los Alamos Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) Plan to target reinvestment and revitalization.

Housing

Significant progress was made toward expanding housing options. Major approvals included:

- 87 deed-restricted affordable studio apartments on Ninth Street;
- a mixed-use development on 20th Street with approximately 285 market-rate housing units and 25,000 sq. ft. of retail space; and
- a purchase, sale, and development agreement with Servitas for 380 affordable and market-rate homes on the A-8-A parcel along DP Road.

The Hill Apartments, consisting of 149 market-rate units, began leasing in November 2025. Additional projects remain in early planning stages.

Fiscal Stewardship

Gross receipts taxes (GRT) account for approximately 72% of the County's overall budget, with LANL as the largest contributor. After years of growth, LANL-related revenues began to level off, and the County projected a 14% decrease in GRT revenues for FY25.

To maintain essential services and advance priority projects, Council approved a 5/8% GRT increase effective July 1, 2026. Conservative budget guidance for FY27 was also adopted, directing departments to maintain flat budgets where possible, limit increases to essential costs, and reduce non-labor expenditures by 10%.

Communication and Engagement

The County continued to provide opportunities for public engagement through

surveys, town halls, open houses, public meetings, and community events. However, the County recognized the need to reach out to the public with appropriate information.

Council requested additional public review for major projects, staff developed “lessons learned” from recent infrastructure efforts, and decision timelines adjusted to allow for public input.

Approval of UbiQD's LEDA Application

Voting 6–0 (Councilor Havemann was absent), the Council approved an ordinance authorizing a Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) project to support UbiQD, LLC, a Los Alamos–based startup originating from LANL’s technology transfer program.

The LEDA project will provide an \$800,000 zero-interest loan to support expansion of UbiQD’s headquarters and operations in Los Alamos County. The LEDA loan will be repaid over 10 years.

UbiQD's LEDA Application

Hunter McDaniel, UbiQD’s Founder and Chief Executive Officer, briefly summarized the company’s history. Founded in 2014, UbiQD has grown from 10 to 43 full time employees, with 30 working locally and 10 owning homes in Los Alamos. The company’s average salary increased from \$74,000 to \$127,000. It also invests significantly in local community activities.

UbiQD is headquartered at 134 East Gate Drive. McDaniel said that the company has continued to expand and increase sales faster than was initially projected. UbiQD would like to purchase an additional building at 170 East Gate Drive for the purpose of expanding its research, development, and prototyping operations. The company plans to maintain Los Alamos as their headquarters even though they are also expanding manufacturing in Pojoaque.

UbiQD Manufacturing Operations

McDaniel described key characteristics of the company’s product. UbiQD is one of the

world’s largest manufacturers of quantum dots (QDs). QDs are vanishingly small (nano) particles of semiconductor material that are highly effective at manipulating color and light. Their properties can be tuned by adjusting their size and composition, which makes them ideal for diverse applications, from agriculture to solar energy.

The dots also have stable optical properties that perform well under harsh environments such as high temperatures and exposure to moisture.

“This is a platform technology that’s useful in really any application where light is being used,” McDaniel said. UbiQD’s first commercial project was greenhouse façade materials where the QDs can enhance crop growth. The company has now expanded to manufacture QDs for solar modules, which boost solar cell performance.

Benefits for the County

The County’s staff report noted how the LEDA loan to UbiQD will yield benefits for the County. The loan will support a growing, innovative company with global impact while strengthening Los Alamos County’s economy through job creation, high wages, and retention of cutting-edge technology development.

The increase in high paying jobs within the County—10 FTE by year 2 at an average salary of \$88,000—and the increased sales of quantum dots produced here in Los Alamos and exported, will provide other benefits for the County.

Community Broadband Network Construction

By unanimous vote (7–0), the Council authorized an amendment to the County’s General Services Agreement with Bonfire Engineering & Construction LLC. The amendment allows the company to pre-purchase construction materials to mitigate supply chain risks, cost increases, and construction delays.

Council also approved the Low-Level Design of the Broadband Network, including amending the schedule of construction

drawings by construction phase. The revised timeline anticipates construction starting in April 2026 and completion by Q2 2028.

Project Status

The project involves building an open-access network where the infrastructure will be owned by the County, allowing multiple internet service providers (ISPs) to use it, said Jerry Smith, the County's Broadband Manager. The network will serve 10,090 locations.

The high-level design was approved in May, and the low-level design, involving field crews to create more detailed designs, was developed in November.

Smith reported that the project is on schedule but that material shortages may be forthcoming due to increased demand. He explained that potential material shortages are forecast because "a lot of folks are doing fiber projects right now, and the \$42 billion federal BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment) program is about to hit the streets, and also hyper scaling of all the Artificial Intelligence (AI) projects." Smith warned that "vendors are poised to buy up all the products that we need."

What's Next?

Bonfire will finalize the preliminary bill of materials for the fiber network and prepare to place material orders so that construction can begin as soon as materials are on site.

During discussion, the Council emphasized the importance of timely community notification and robust communication plans. Smith and Deputy County Manager Juan Rael explained that a marketing plan is being developed that includes press releases and social media outreach. A public web page will be set up, with ISP pricing and sign-up information to notify residents about the network.

A phase-specific resident notification plan will also be implemented prior to construction in each phase, using local notices and door hangers, so that residents know when construction and sign-up will be available in their area.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2026

By unanimous votes (7–0), the Council elected Councilor Ryti as Council Chair and Councilor Herrmann Council Vice Chair for 2026.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

Observer Corps Report – County Council – January 13

2025 Regional Development Corporation (RDC) Annual Report, Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) Commission, Waste to Energy Plant

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

Regional Development Commission (RDC) Annual Report

Pat Vanderpool, Executive Director of the RDC, and Deborah Breinfeld, Economic Regional Development Coordinator, presented the RDC Annual Report for 2025. Council took no action.

What Is the RDC?

Vanderpool explained that RDC is a regional non-profit economic development organization in Northern New Mexico with seven counties and eleven tribal entities in its service area. RDC partners with Los Alamos County and works on its behalf within the four-county service area of Los Alamos, Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Taos counties.

RDC provides grants for manufacturing, technology, tribal, and micro-businesses annually throughout its service territory. Its Business Retention and Expansion program provides technical assistance and resources to help existing businesses grow. Additionally, RDC has an extensive workforce development program in partnership with six educational institutions.

Highlighted Accomplishments in 2025

- RDC Direct Investment Program: RDC awarded 71 grants totaling \$409,594, resulting in 90 new jobs and \$1.7 million in increased revenue in Northern New Mexico. The awarded grants included 11 small businesses in Los Alamos County.
- Participated in Los Alamos Day and Broadband Days during the 2025 Legislative Session.
- Hosted the LANL Supplier Event in July in partnership with LANL's Small Business Office to recognize small businesses supporting LANL.
- Engaged in Los Alamos Commerce & Development Corporation (LACDC)'s monthly partner meetings.

Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) Commission

Council discussed the merits and drawbacks of setting up a citizen commission for the Metropolitan Redevelopment Areas (MRAs) in White Rock and the Town Site. County Manager Anne Laurent summarized the background for these two MRAs, including the passage of ordinances, adoption of MRA

plans, and potential for public-private partnerships and tax increment financing.

The establishment and existence of an MRA authorizes the use of public financing to address areas of blight. Laurent discussed the tools enabled by the MRA such as public-private partnerships and Tax Increment Financing Districts.

Laurent emphasized that the MRAs in Los Alamos County primarily involve privately owned parcels. Participation in the MRA is purely voluntary. Being located within the boundaries of an MRA does not obligate the property owner or the governing body responsible for approving the use of public funds for public benefit to move a re-development project forward or seek public financial support.

Laurent said that no MRA applications have been submitted since the recent opening of the application process. However, the County anticipates a few in the next months.

Proposal for a Citizen MRA Commission

Council currently serves as the decision-making governing body having authority over the MRAs. Its function is to consider requests for the use of public dollars on a case-by-case basis.

Council debated the creation of a citizen MRA commission. Expressing his support for this idea, Councilor Reagor recommended that such a commission include business people with experience in contracting, retail, and financing.

During public comment, County residents Lisa Shin and James Wernicke also urged the Council to ensure that local business owners have a seat at the table to strengthen transparency and trust. Wernicke emphasized that the citizen commission would be enriched by the experience of local entrepreneurs in navigating the local business environment. Shin argued that a citizen MRA commission was needed to ensure independent oversight and to garner public input.

Councilor Herrmann reiterated the concern about the potential for limited transparency and

public engagement with Council serving as the MRA Commission. Laurent said that public input would continue to be encouraged by Council serving as the commission, just as was done for the UbiQD LEDA project at the Council meeting on January 6, 2026. She noted that there are also procedural notifications to property owners within the MRA.

Challenges of a Citizen MRA Commission

Laurent said that the County's recommendation—supported by the Los Alamos Commerce and Development Corporation (LACDC) and Los Alamos MainStreet support—was that Council continue to serve as the MRA governing body for efficiency in moving applications forward.

A separate citizen MRA commission would serve solely as an advisory board to Council, said Laurent. She noted that its review of applications would entail an additional step for any MRA project requesting public funding because any public-private partnerships must still go through Council. In addition, a citizen MRA Commission would not replace the necessary function of County staff to review applications for completeness and to develop partnership agreements that conform with applicable laws prior to Council's consideration of approval.

Laurent said other communities use citizen boards to prioritize public amenity improvements or redevelop public parcels. If the MRA includes publicly owned land, the commission is used as a steering committee for visioning the re-development of the public lands. However, the County's MRAs do not include a lot of public property.

Laurent also noted the time-consuming nature of filling a citizen board and the need for professional expertise in areas such as commercial real estate, commercial development, banking, law, affordable housing, or licensed design professionals. In our relatively small community, the chance of finding specific professionals with the time and

without conflicts of interest to serve on the commission is limited.

Next Step

Laurent said that, if Council wishes to delegate some of its review responsibilities to a citizen MRA commission, then a future action item must be put on the Council agenda. An ordinance would need to be drafted to define the commission's authority within the bounds of existing laws. Administrative staff and legal counsel support would be required.

Waste to Energy Plant

Mozart Devco LLC presented its plan to build a waste-to-energy plant in North Central New Mexico. Steve Stringer, a 35-year White Rock resident and Mozart team member, gave a brief overview of the project. Stringer introduced Mozart co-founders Mark Rutledge and Michael Dwinnell to provide more technical details and to explain how the County could be an important partner in this endeavor through diversion of municipal solid waste via what is called a feedstock agreement.

Rutledge said that the waste-to-energy plant, expected to operate in 36 months, will process 200 tons of municipal waste daily and generate 10 megawatts of carbon-free baseline electricity. The plant will be located on Ohkay Owingeh tribal lands, just northwest of Española off US 285, with a footprint of 12–15 acres.

Los Alamos County produces between 60–80 tons of trash per day, said Rutledge. By trucking this trash 20 miles to the Ohkay Owingeh plant instead of shipping it 90 miles to the landfill in Las Lunas, he estimated that the County stands to save nearly \$1 million annually in hauling and tipping fees.

Rutledge emphasized that the planned waste-to-energy plant is not a research and development project but rather an established technology in North America and around the world. "We have a global footprint," he said. "We've also chosen proven and bankable technology partners to design the waste to syngas module and the power generation module."

Stringer said that the plant will process carbon-based trash, including food, grass, plastics, and rubber. The plant will not burn the trash but rather will gasify it into syngas (synthetic gas), a combustible mixture of hydrogen, carbon monoxide, and carbon dioxide. The syngas is then run through fuel cells to generate commercial electricity.

Rutledge explained that the plant will be connected to the Jemez Mountain Electric Cooperative grid.

What happens to the carbon? Power generation will not be the plant's only product; Devco also plans to capture carbon dioxide emissions and monetize carbon-dioxide products. "We are partnering with one of the leading carbon sequestration and utilization consulting firms in the world, Armored Ducks, for developing our treatment of the carbon byproducts, and the technologies of growing markets that we can employ."

Rutledge said that he found graphene to be the most interesting item on the list of byproducts. "The potential uses for graphene are immense, and the market for such will only be limited by supply for the foreseeable future," he said. "The upside potential is tremendous, so it'll be a very interesting one to keep an eye on."

Rutledge summarized the many benefits that he expected the waste-to-energy plant could bring to the region. The plant will produce clean power to supplant fossil fuel-based energy production. It will create well-paying jobs in the region. "And lastly, this venture is in alignment with State policies on economic diversity and energy policies," he concluded.

Council Discussion

Councilor Neal-Clinton asked how the County could measure the success of the project. Rutledge was confident about the success of the project. The primary benefit to the County will be cost abatement of handling municipal solid waste. "I would expect that you will see the benefits immediately upon commercial operation...."

Rutledge added that another measure of success will be the plant ability to operate sustainably for many years.

Neal-Clinton asked how the County could adjust if the plant is not successful. Rutledge said that Mozart had a feedstock agreement already in place with the North Central Solid Waste Authority for a good portion of the waste that it will need.

Councilor Cull inquired about the County's liability regarding waste sent to the project and the potential for back charges. Occasionally, the County finds things in the waste that comes from the Laboratory, she said. Rutledge replied that Mozart will have a screening process on its end for things that shouldn't go into the plant and will arrange to haul that material back to the County EcoStation. Public Works Director Eric Martinez added that the County's EcoStation also has radioactive detectors that screen waste coming from the Laboratory before it gets into the waste stream for transport.

Councilor Cull expressed concern that the County might not be able to deliver the amount of municipal waste that it initially promised. "If we initially say we're going to contribute 60–80 tons," she asked, "what happens if we implement some kind of waste reduction methods up here and we can only promise 40–50 tons?" Rutledge said that would be addressed in the agreement negotiated between Mozart and the County.

What's Next?

Devco plans to undertake several tasks over the next few months.

- Schedule or present project details to the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) and the Board of Public Utilities (BPU).
- Negotiate the feedstock agreement terms with Los Alamos County, including reject handling, tipping/haul charges, and flexibility for waste reduction plans.
- Coordinate with Jemez Mountain Electric Cooperative on substation/line interconnection requirements and any

line upgrades needed to support the planned ~10 megawatts interconnection.

- Evaluate carbon sequestration, utilization, and monetization options (including capture methods and downstream uses such as graphene or sequestration) and present recommended options to the stakeholders.

Devco hopes to be able to return to Council with project details and draft feedstock agreement before the end of the year.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

Observer Corps Report — County Council – January 27

North Mesa Recreation Master Plan, Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) Commission

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

North Mesa Recreation Master Plan

Voting unanimously (7–0), Council accepted the North Mesa Recreation Master Plan.

Final Concept Design and Phasing Priorities

Karina Rodgers and Bob Oberdorfer of Sites Southwest emphasized that public involvement was integral to shaping the final conceptual master plan. The consultants created two design concepts based on community engagement sessions attended by more than 250 participants. These concepts were presented at an open house, where residents voted and shared feedback. Rodgers noted that more than 190 responses were collected and used to inform the final concept design.

Oberdorfer said implementation of the plan was envisioned as being phased out over several years. He outlined the priorities, noting that they were largely based on public feedback, which indicated the highest priority was the bike park.

- Phase 1 – Bike park with pump track and skills area; and rehabilitation of the perimeter walking path;
- Phase 2 – Landscaping and habitat improvements in the open space;
- Phase 3 – Sand volleyball and dog park improvements;
- Phase 4 – Community garden improvement or expansion; and
- Phase 5 – Multi-use pavilion for a wide range of uses, including covered basketball, volleyball, rollerblading; and a food truck plaza.

The total project cost is estimated at \$12.9 million.

Public Input

The plan received strong support from 28 public speakers, with the roller derby (13 speakers) and mountain biking (8 speakers) user groups particularly well-represented.

Equestrians raised concerns about the potential for conflicts between bikers and horse riders. One speaker warned that "the addition of a bike park on North Mesa will likely increase horse-bike interactions on Kwage Mesa and surrounding trail systems." She

noted that while most people are courteous, such encounters can create fear and safety risks for both horses and riders.

Lisa Reader and Stacy Buck recommended that the County's first priority be relocating and mitigating the project's potential negative impacts on existing uses. Reader said, "If you are going to put the bike park on the east side, [then] before a shovel is put in there, the trails and natural areas and the walking paths should go first."

Reader also stressed the need to manage the public's expectations, given the number and scale of recreational projects proposed for North Mesa. "Most members of the public would reasonably assume that, should this plan pass tonight, the shovels would be in the ground as soon as possible," she said, adding that residents should understand the overall magnitude of recreational investments being proposed for this single area. Projected costs include \$13M for the North Mesa Recreation Master Plan, \$16M for the North Mesa Artificial Turf Study and Field Realignment, and \$3M for the Brewer Arena Upgrade Project. Reader noted that additional costs have yet to be determined for the North Mesa Picnic Area Plan and Bayo Canyon Trailhead Project, and that no comprehensive master plan currently exists for the Equestrian Park.

Reader questioned how the County will allocate money across these projects, and how priorities will ultimately be established.

What's Next?

Council unanimously approved the North Mesa Recreation Master Plan, emphasizing the importance of community input in future budget decisions.

Parks Superintendent Wendy Parker stressed that there is currently no dedicated funding for the project and that implementation of its phases will depend on the annual budget process. Councilor Ryti added that the phasing can be adjusted based on community needs and Council decisions.

Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) Commission

Voting 5–2 (Councilors Hand and Reagor in opposition), Council chose to maintain its role as the governing decision-making body for MRA funding and to take no further action on establishing a separate MRA Commission.

Councilor Ryti said he requested this agenda item due to the lack of opportunity for action during the workshop session held two weeks earlier. He added that the discussion was also intended to clarify for the public the direction that Council was taking on the issue.

Proposal for a Separate MRA Commission

Councilor Hand proposed establishing a new commission to review MRA projects and make recommendations to Council, similar to existing boards and commissions that report to Council. She said a new commission would increase transparency and citizen input while reducing the need for Council to make decisions on individual MRA projects.

Councilor Reagor largely agreed with Councilor Hand, but suggested creating an advisory committee or economic incentives board instead of a formal commission. He said the group could provide business-focused guidance on MRA and LEDA projects and should include members with experience in banking, construction, retail, and other relevant fields. Reagor envisioned the committee as having authority to identify priority projects and help applicants meet the conditions required under state law.

Councilor Reagor added that business professionals could offer Council practical, real-world advice on proposed initiatives.

Council Discussion

Most councilors felt that establishing a new commission could create several challenges. They cited the ongoing difficulty of recruiting members for existing boards and commissions, as well as the impracticality of asking qualified small business owners to commit to five-year terms given their demanding schedules.

Several councilors questioned the value of creating a new commission, noting that decisions on whether to move forward with MRA projects ultimately rest with Council.

Councilors also expressed concern that MRA applicants might not welcome being advised by other businesses on how to operate, and that a new commission would add another layer of bureaucracy to the application process. They noted that there are currently too few MRA applications to justify expanding the review process.

Expressing exasperation, Councilor Neal-Clinton said Council already invests heavily in communication and public engagement through outreach, forums, conversations, and surveys. "If we're not being transparent, I want to know what it looks like to someone else," she said. "I don't know what else we can do."

Councilor Havemann echoed those concerns, saying that good governance requires a balance between transparency and efficiency. "Part of good governance is transparency and public engagement, but part of good governance is also efficiency and effectiveness," she said. She added that, while it is important to hear from business professionals and help applicants succeed, she did not believe adding another layer of bureaucracy would provide sufficient value.

Public Comment

Local business owner Lisa Shin emphasized the need for greater openness and transparency in the MRA process to ensure meaningful public input. She expressed concern that the current MRA review committee is internal, being composed solely of County staff.

Shin said transparency could be improved by opening review committee meetings to the public and recording all Zoom meetings between County staff and potential applicants. She also criticized the MRA application review process as overly rushed, saying it does not allow sufficient time for the public to review applications and provide meaningful feedback.

Shin added that commissioners with business experience and a strong

understanding of the local economy could add value by offering more effective guidance to applicants.

Jeffrey Branch, representing Columbus Capital, voiced support for the current MRA process, noting that it has already taken the company several years and that Columbus Capital has invested more than \$16 million in the community. He said the company has made efforts to be transparent, including holding multiple meetings with members of the business community and local residents, although meetings between the company and County staff are generally not public.

Branch said the project is at a critical stage and warned that changing course now could jeopardize its progress. He urged Council not to create a new commission, arguing that doing so would delay and complicate the MRA process and undermine the program's goals.

Greg Gonzalez, also representing Columbus Capital, echoed Branch's concerns about the complexity of the MRA process and the challenge of finding experts in all relevant areas. He said that Council, with its access to experts, is better positioned than an independent commission to oversee the MRA process.

Gonzalez added, "With respect to transparency and protecting the interests of the County in relation to the MRA, I think it goes without saying that there's no entity that's going to protect the transparency of the County and the County's interest as vehemently as this County Council."

Phil Gursky, representing the development project at Longview in White Rock, said the company plans to submit an MRA request for the project. He noted that the MRA process can be complex, but emphasized that the project must still comply with all standard land-use, development code, building permit, and other regulatory requirements and associated reviews.

Gursky said MRA tools are primarily financial in nature, intended to improve project feasibility, and cannot replace other required approvals. He added that many key decisions—including funding, taxation,

assessments, and bonding—must be made by Council rather than a commission. For that reason, he urged Council not to adopt a separate MRA commission at this time.

To address concerns about transparency and public input, Gursky offered two suggestions. He recommended requiring an additional public meeting by the MRA applicant prior to the introduction of an ordinance to provide MRA funding for the proposed project, and suggested that the County post MRA applications on its public portal, similar to planning, zoning, and building permit applications, to ensure ongoing public access to relevant materials.

Gursky concluded that these measures would provide more productive transparency and allow developers to work effectively with staff on technical, legal, accounting, and public engineering issues throughout the MRA process.

What's Next

Councilor Cull requested that staff encourage potential MRA applicants to present their proposals to Council at an open public meeting to allow for public comment. County Manager Anne Laurent agreed to make this a standard practice for incoming applicants.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

Observer Corps Report – Planning & Zoning Commission – January 14

Commissioners present: Karen Easton (Chair), Rachel Adler, Marlon Brown, Katherine Bruell, Robert Chrien, David Hampton, Stephanie Nakhleh, and Ronald Nelson. Commissioner Rebecca White was absent.

Update on Affordable Housing Initiatives

Dan Osborn, Housing and Special Projects Manager, provided an update on the county's affordable housing initiatives. The updated Affordable Housing Plan, approved in 2024, aims to increase housing density and support for low- and moderate-income households.

Construction of New Housing Units

For the County to achieve higher levels of affordability and community growth, Osborn said the plan identified the need for 2400 new units across all socioeconomic spectrums: all income levels, all stages of life, working in different industries. Seven County-supported projects are completed or slated to provide 1,169 new units:

- Mirador (161 units), complete
- Canyon Walk Apartments (70 units), complete
- The Bluffs Senior Living (64 units), complete
- The Hills (149 units), in progress
- Mirador Mixed-Use (57 units), in progress
- 20th Street Redevelopment (300 units), in pipeline
- A8A workforce housing on DP Road (380 units, including 120 deed-restricted units for households earning between 60–100% AMI), in pipeline

Eleven private housing projects approved or in the pipeline have the capacity to provide 1,334 new units:

- Homes at North Community (Arkansas) (44 units), in progress
- Sherwood Rounds (29 units), in progress
- 2201 Trinity Dr. (Century Bank) (125 units), approved
- Ponderosa Estates (48 units), approved
- Cañada Bonita (160 units), approved
- LA Center (Mari-Mac) 322 units), approved
- North Community (4 units), approved
- Crestview (5 units), approved
- Guest House (Hilltop House) (60 units), approved
- Arbolada (137 units), in pipeline
- North Mesa LAPS development project (400 units, with 380 units, including 120 deed-restricted units for those making 60–100% Annual Median Income), in pipeline

The County also partnered with 9th Street Apartments, LLC, to preserve 87 deed-restricted studio units for people making 45% (AMI) or less. The units are located in buildings built in 1947–1948: Thunderbird Apartments on 11th Street and Aspen Studio Apartments on 9th Street. Additional funding is being provided to create some ADA units and make other upgrades around the properties.

Unexpectedly, the 9th Street Apartments are only about 80% full. Osborn said that it has not been able to lease all of its studio units because few applicants meet the 45% AMI income cap. People expressing interest are typically teachers, first responders, hospital folks, and others making 50–55% AMI. “We’ve had to turn over 50 people away,” he said, adding that some adjustments to the deed-restriction tiers might be warranted.

In 2026, Osborn mentioned the County will continue to explore partnerships for additional affordable housing projects, including a senior care or residential facility at 1000 Sombrillo. An RV Park Feasibility Study is currently underway to evaluate the potential for both long-term stays for individuals living in RVs and short-term stays for tourists and other visitors.

Targeted Income Support

In addition to increasing housing stock, the Affordable Housing Plan also includes targeted income support programs, including rental voucher assistance, down payment assistance, and home rehabilitation assistance. Osborn reported that the home rehabilitation program had 23 inquiries and funded four loans last year. The home buyer assistance program had four inquiries and two loans, he said, with a major marketing push planned for the summer.

The budget guidance in early 2025 included using additional GRT to start paying into a housing fund for affordable housing initiatives. More information about the planned use of this revenue will be provided during the upcoming budget hearings in April.

Craig Martin and June Fabryka-Martin

January Lunch with a Leader: Abolish the Electoral College and Elect the President by Popular Vote

At the January Lunch with a Leader Anne Galer, League member from Central New Mexico and former Foreign Service Officer, stated that the United States is a partial democracy, not a full democracy, because we do not directly elect the president and vice president.

Instead, Article II of the Constitution decrees that each state is to appoint a number of electors equal to the size of that state's congressional delegation. The method of choosing the electors is left up to the state legislature.

The number of representatives in the House is now limited to 435. Each state is allowed at least one representative. The remaining 385 seats are apportioned according to the decennial census.

The twenty-third amendment granted three electors to the District of Columbia, so there now are 538 electors in the Electoral College.

Today in New Mexico each political party appoints a slate of potential electors to vote for their party's presidential and vice presidential candidates if they win the majority of votes in the state. In New Mexico, as in most states, it's "winner takes all." The entire slate of electors casts their votes for the winning candidates. In Nebraska and Maine, the vote may be split.

Electoral College Makes Some Votes Count More than Others

Problem: electoral college

- One person's vote carries more or less weight depending where they live.

Solution: Direct Popular Vote

- One person = one vote, no matter where you live.

	Wyoming	Florida
Population	576,851	21,538,187
Electoral Votes	3	30
Population per Electoral Vote	192,284	717,940



Data Source: 2020 Census

Electoral College vs. Direct Popular Vote. Source: 2020 Census.

The system is unfair in several respects. The votes of the losing candidates are nullified in 48 states. An elector from a small state represents far fewer people than one in a large state, but that elector's vote carries the same weight in the Electoral College (EC). Thus, the winner in the EC may not have won the popular vote. In five national elections, the winner of the popular vote has lost in the EC, most recently in 2016 when Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton.

The League of Women Voters has sought since 1970 to abolish the Electoral College. Today communications are instantaneous; our voting systems are fast and secure. It does not take weeks or months to count the votes. Thus, it is time to amend the Constitution to establish one person, one vote. This would require two-thirds approval by the House and Senate and ratification by three-quarters of the states. There have been many attempts to pass an amendment, most recently with Senate Joint Resolution 121 in 2024.

In response to a question, Galer explained the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, which was devised in 2006 as an effort to bypass the amendment process. States participating in the compact agree to cast their electoral votes for the winner of the popular vote. However, as she pointed out, the system is unstable because states can join or withdraw whenever they wish. The compact is unenforceable and may be unconstitutional.

Now is the time for the League of Women Voters to build momentum to change this antiquated element of our Constitution.

Barbara Calef

What Is the Role of the County Boards and Commissions?

Until this month, the *Update* included the list of County Boards and Commissions vacancies. The purpose was to inspire League members to volunteer to serve on one of the many boards that advise the County Council. However, it has been suggested that it might be more helpful to explain the purpose of each board and how it operates. So, each month this year the *Update* will focus on one of the boards.

An Insider's View of the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB)

The ESB is a seven-member board that reports to County Council on a wide range of issues pertaining to environmental sustainability. Our Staff Liaison is Sustainability Manager Angelica Gurule.

In 2026, the ESB will support the second year of implementation of the County's Climate Action Plan (CAP) by providing recommendations to advance local climate goals. Priority actions include improving energy efficiency and electrification in homes and buildings, expanding electric vehicle adoption and charging infrastructure, promoting green building standards, reducing transportation-related emissions, strengthening recycling and composting, supporting local food systems, and advancing climate vulnerability and resilience efforts.

The ESB will also support sustainability education and public engagement by advising on outreach initiatives, participating in community events such as Earth Day, Science Fest, Farmers' Markets, and Nature Center programs, and contributing to educational campaigns and public forums. In addition, the Board will review and advise on related sustainability policies, including water and energy conservation, transportation planning, and waste reduction. Technical support activities may include advancing residential energy audits, researching single-use plastic bags, and coordinating with Utilities, Environmental Services, and community partners to accelerate countywide sustainability efforts.

Terms are two years long. We meet on the third Thursday of each month at 5:30 in Council Chambers. ESB members also serve as liaisons to other boards and collaborate with County departments and with community partners such as the Sustainability Alliance, PEEC, and LAPS. The County has a good Sustainability website that shows what we work on:

<https://www.losalamosnm.us/Initiatives/Sustainability-and-Conservation-Initiatives>

I'm currently serving my third term on the Board. It is exciting and incredibly important work with some of the most capable, passionate, and inspiring people I have ever met! Another great "perk" is that our work is respected by Staff and Council, often making it easy to make positive changes in our community.

We currently have a vacancy and encourage you to apply through the County website:

<https://www.losalamosnm.us/Government/Leadership/Boards-Commissions>

To get a feel for our meetings, you can watch the video recordings (recommended!) at

<https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

Questions? Please feel free to email me, Sue Barns, at dogstarz505@gmail.com

Sue Barns

Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies

Tickler Report

Tentative Council Agenda Items as of January 23, 2026

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

- **Lease of Portion of Golf Course Community Building to Outside Entity**
 - 02/03/26 meeting. Introduction of ordinance.
- **Possible Changes to the Charter**
 - 02/10/26 meeting. Action requested.
- **Brewer Arena Construction Improvements (placeholder)**
 - 02/17/26 meeting. Action requested.
- **2026 Los Alamos Federal Priorities**
 - 02/17/26 meeting. Action requested.
- **Sustainability Initiatives**
 - 02/17/26 meeting. Quarterly briefing. No action requested.

eComment Tool for Council meetings:

You can submit online public comments for selected upcoming meetings at:

<https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

Select List View and This Year. Locate the meeting and look for “Comment” in the “eComment” column in the far-right, indicating that the meeting is open for public comment.

See details at:

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

County BCC Vacancies as of December 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
○ 3 terms ending January 6, 2026	
▪ Environmental Sustainability Board	0
○ No terms ending soon	
▪ Historic Preservation Advisory Board	0
○ 3 terms ending April 30, 2026	
▪ Library Board	0
○ No terms ending soon	
▪ Lodgers' Tax Advisory Board	1
○ No terms ending soon	
▪ Parks and Recreation Board	2
○ No terms ending soon	
▪ Personnel Board	0
○ 2 terms ending March 31, 2026	
▪ Planning and Zoning Commission	0
○ 3 terms ending March 31, 2026	
▪ Transportation Board	0
○ 4 terms ending February 28, 2026	

Totals: 4 vacancies, 18 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

In this issuePage

Calendar 1

February Lunch with a Leader: Garrett VeneKlasen 1

Statement from LWVUS on Federal Immigration Enforcement and the Erosion of Constitutional Rights 2

President’s Message: Laura Paskus Warns of the Destruction of Our Environment..... 2

Developing Questions for the June 2026 Primary Ballot 4

Annual Fund Drive Party on Tuesday, February 9..... 4

Health Care Forum! 5

Observer Corps Report — County Council – January 6..... 6

Observer Corps Report – County Council – January 13..... 8

Observer Corps Report — County Council – January 27..... 12

Observer Corps Report – Planning & Zoning Commission – January 14..... 15

January Lunch with a Leader: Abolish the Electoral College and Elect the President by Popular Vote..... 17

What Is the Role of the County Boards and Commissions? 18

Tickler Reports – Council Agenda Items and BCC Vacancies 19