

# UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos  
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## *Calendar*

May 5	Early voting begins in the Municipal Building, 8 a.m.
May 21	Lunch with a Leader, Marcela Diaz, Unitarian Church, 11:45 a.m.
May 28	Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon
June 2	<b>Primary Election Day</b>

## **May Lunch with a Leader: Celina Diaz**

The monthly Lunch with a Leader program will be held in the Fellowship Hall of the Unitarian Church from 11:45-1 p.m. on Thursday, May 21. The speaker will be Marcela Diaz, founder and Executive Director of *Somos Un Pueblo Unido*, a statewide immigrant-based organization that works to promote racial and worker justice.

Diaz's presentation will focus on the last legislative session, with an update on immigration legislation and its impact on New Mexico. Somos works to build a community that does not discriminate against people based on their national origin, that institutes humane migration politics, and that protects the human rights of everyone irrespective of where they are born or what documents they carry.

With an active membership of close to 3,000 people in eight counties, Somos offers community education about rights and remedies; forges leadership opportunities for immigrants and low-wage workers; provides legal services to wage theft victims; engages Latinos in the political and electoral process; and leads grassroots campaigns for local and national policies that strengthen communities.



*Karyl Ann Armbruster*

## **President's Message: Voting Power**

Even as a longtime lawyer who understands that the arc of the moral (and legal) universe takes detours on its way to bending toward justice, the decision this week by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Louisiana v. Callais* was shocking. The Roberts Court has now fully gutted Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which for more than 60 years has carried out the voting protections of the 14th and 15th Amendments, expressly prohibiting denial of the right to vote based on "race, color, or previous conditions of servitude."

The *Callais* decision opens the door wide for Southern states to gerrymander their districts in a way that significantly diminishes the voting power of Black voters. The gerrymandered districts will be upheld so long as the states characterize their intentions as partisan rather than racist. The Governor of Louisiana immediately suspended the state's May 16 U.S. House primary elections and the June 27 runoff elections, in order to allow redrawn maps, notwithstanding early voting and absentee ballots already cast. This is just part of the broader redistricting battle being waged across the country in a number of states. Unsurprisingly, the calls to "reform" the Supreme Court through term limits or additional seats or other measures have become more numerous and taken on a greater sense of urgency. For example, Richard L. Hasen, *Slate*, "SCOTUS' Voting Rights Act ruling is the worst decision in a century;" Robert Hubbell on *Substack*, "*Callais* decision demonstrates the need for radical reform of the Supreme Court."

Apart from any Court reforms that might be reasonable and possible in the future, there are legislative fixes that the League of Women Voters has been working toward for many years, on both the national and state levels. In particular, the League has advocated passionately for fair redistricting--the drawing of maps by an independent commission rather than by the legislators whose seats might be jeopardized or made safer depending on a district's contours.

Bringing an end to both partisan and racial gerrymandering will assure that all people can participate fairly in elections and is necessary to achieve the original objectives of the Voting Rights Act and the 14th Amendment to secure equal protection under the law.

*Felicia Orth*

## ***Welcome, New Members!***

**DeAnna Kruse** writes: As a new member, I am introducing myself to you now, but as far back as I can remember, I was using the LWV candidate profiles as a part of my voting research. I joined LWVLA as a recent resident of Los Alamos. No, more accurately, I am a returning one. You see, I was actually born in Los Alamos. And over the years, it never mattered what state I was in or if it was a big city or small town, LWV helped inform my vote - especially for those essential down-down-ballot races. I was able to see this in part from the candidate's side as well when I supported a state congressional candidate in her election. It is truly valuable for both candidate and constituent to hear the candidate's unvarnished vision directly. Additionally, I really enjoyed working in the political funding apparatus by developing and implementing a multi-year, state-wide political giving campaign for a private NM benefactor.

However, most of my professional and volunteer life has been spent working in smaller businesses and non-profits. I would say, all the work has utilized my MBA business training in one way or another. (Maybe that and a few trusty spreadsheets. Yes, I'll admit it, I don't know what to do without them.) Activities like accounting, HR, tax preparation, government reporting, fundraising and bidding – always with an organizational approach, which some might say probably borders on manic. Like anyone who has worked in a small business, you are not only the chief cook but also the bottle washer and you just do what needs doing to the best of your ability.

Now if I could just figure out how to help bring about some great snow conditions for next year's skiing all the better. In the meantime, I split my time with a home on the Rio Grande in Embudo and hope to find time for traveling, hiking, cooking... I look forward to meeting all the LWVLA team in the future, and helping to not only protect, but maybe even expand all of our precious voting rights.

## ***Annual Meeting Summary***

The minutes of the 2026 Annual Meeting are included in this newsletter. Briefly, the members adopted a new position called Community Health to replace the outdated Indigent Health Care position. They approved a new study of waste to syngas. They adopted the proposed budgets for FY 2027 and FY 2028. Finally, they elected a new board to be led by President Leslie Wallstrom.

# Observer Corps Report — County Council – March 31

*Atomic City Transit Saturday Service Pilot Program; Bandelier Shuttle Service; Small/Local Business Action Items; DOE Cleanup Priorities*

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

## Atomic City Transit's Saturday Service Pilot Project

Anna Brunson, Senior Management Analyst for the Atomic City Transit (ACT) Division, presented an overview of ATC's 3-month pilot project (August–October 2025) that offered free, on-demand Saturday bus service to evaluate community demand for weekend transit.

The pilot provided shared, door-to-door rides that could be booked via app or phone. Brunson reported that, over the course of 13 Saturdays, the service recorded 359 trips by 471 riders, with approximately 60 percent of trips being shared rides, which improved operational efficiency.

Brunson said the pilot demonstrated clear community demand and strong overall performance. The most common destinations included grocery stores, the library, and other community spaces, with peak usage occurring during midday hours and in connection with local events.

Public feedback was largely positive, with many riders expressing support for continuing the service. However, Brunson noted that driver shortages and high turnover present ongoing challenges to sustaining or expanding the program.

As next steps, ACT plans to conduct a comprehensive transit service study to evaluate existing routes and explore a potential shift toward more on-demand service. The long-term goal is to develop a sustainable

implementation plan for expanded transit options.

## Bandelier Shuttle Service

Keith Wilson, Deputy Public Works Director, outlined the history and recent changes to Atomic City Transit's (ACT) Bandelier shuttle service.

The shuttle program began in 2011 following the Las Conchas Fire, which damaged parking access at Bandelier National Monument. The service later expanded into a seven-day operation running from the White Rock Visitor Center, carrying more than 100,000 riders annually through 2019.

Ridership declined sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, in 2024–2025, the National Park Service faced staffing shortages and layoffs, limiting its ability to support shuttle operations from White Rock. As a result, ACT discontinued that route and shifted to operating only internal park shuttles, leading to a significant drop in ridership to approximately 3,300 passengers in 2024.

For the current season, ACT and the National Park Service have agreed to continue running only internal park shuttles between the mesa-top and the Visitor Center in Frijoles Canyon. The service will be limited to high-demand periods such as spring break, weekends, holidays, and the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. Wilson reported strong early results, with more than 20,000 riders in just 11 days—nearly matching total ridership for all of 2024.

Wilson also noted concerns that eliminating the White Rock shuttle could reduce visitor traffic to nearby communities. To help offset potential economic impacts, Los Alamos County is working to promote other local attractions, including Manhattan Project National Historical Park and the Bradbury Science Museum. Outreach efforts may include onboard bus displays and visitor kiosks at shuttle stops within the park to encourage broader exploration of the area.

## Update on Small/Local Business Initiatives

Elias Isaacson, Community Development Director, provided a quarterly update on County initiatives related to small businesses. The initiatives primarily focus on improving efficiency, transparency, and online access to better support businesses and applicants.

### *Local Economic Development Programs*

Isaacson reported that since the launch of the Small Retail Local Economic Development Act (Retail LEDA) program in September 2025, the County has received about 20 initial applications. Of those, three have advanced to the full application stage, with two also pursuing Metropolitan Redevelopment Act (MRA) funding for projects in East Downtown Los Alamos and White Rock.

However, many applicants were not eligible to proceed with Retail LEDA funding. Isaacson said that a common issue was proposals focused on deferred maintenance—such as repairs or upgrades like HVAC—which do not align with the program's intent. Retail LEDA funding is designed to support projects that expand economic activity, rather than maintain existing operations.

Even when applications are not eligible, Isaacson emphasized that Community Development Department staff work with applicants to provide guidance and help redirect them toward projects that better meet the program's economic development goals.

### *Process Improvements and External Review*

Isaacson summarized a recent discussion with Cities Work, a consultant the County partnered with last year to evaluate internal processes and identify barriers to fostering a stronger small business environment in Los Alamos.

He highlighted several preliminary findings and recommendations expected in Cities Work's upcoming report. The firm noted that the County performs well in permitting efficiency, issuing approximately 730 to 830 permits annually, with average turnaround times of about three days for residential

permits and five days or fewer for commercial permits.

Cities Work recommended increasing public visibility of these performance metrics, such as through an online data dashboard, to better communicate the County's efficiency to the business community.

Additional recommendations included expanding online services and improving remote access to the Community Development Department, making it easier for businesses to navigate processes and engage with staff.

### *Online Tools and Business Support*

Isaacson said that the County is rolling out several online tools to support local businesses and streamline development processes.

These new tools include an online directory listing businesses, nonprofits, and events that will later be promoted more widely, an expanded online development guide with step-by-step permitting information and staff contacts, and upcoming informational videos explaining how to start a business and navigate County services and pre-application meetings.

## DOE Cleanup Priorities

By unanimous vote, Council authorized the Council Chair to send a letter on behalf of the County Council to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary regarding the County's perspective on DOE's cleanup priorities.

### *Dispute Over Cleanup of MDA C*

The letter focuses on a dispute over Material Disposal Area (MDA) C, a former radioactive and hazardous waste landfill. While DOE has proposed delaying cleanup due to nearby operations, NMED has issued a compliance order requiring DOE to justify that deferral.

The County opposes prioritizing MDA C cleanup over other efforts. Councilor Ryti noted the MDA C is inaccessible to anyone without a security clearance and is considered stable if left undisturbed. He warned that prioritizing the costly cleanup of MDA C could

take resources away from more urgent public health and safety projects.

### *County Cleanup Priorities*

The County's broader priorities include addressing the hexavalent chromium groundwater plume, protecting drinking water wells, improving transparency on potential land transfers, clearing unexploded ordnance in Rendija Canyon, and accelerating removal of transuranic waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

The County also requested that any fines collected by NMED from DOE be reinvested locally in cleanup efforts rather than placed into the state's general fund.

*June Fabryka-Martin, Craig Martin*

The ESB previously presented an overview of its plastic bag research and recommendation to Council at the October 21, 2025, Council meeting [See November 2025 issues of the *LWVLA Update*]. Due to the history of limited community support and the sensitive nature of this topic, the ESB indicated at that time that additional Council guidance was needed before pursuing further engagement with businesses and community. Council took no action at that meeting.

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## **Observer Corps Report - County Council - April 7**

### *Possible Ban on Single Use Plastics*

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

### **Possible Ban on Single Use Plastics**

Voting 6–1 (Councilor Reagor in opposition), Council directed the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) to develop a proposal for a possible ban of single-use plastic bags.

Council requested that the proposal be based on what other New Mexico communities have already done. It expressed a preference for no mandatory fee. The ESB has 90 days to return to the Council with a draft proposal.

## **Observer Corps Report – County Council – April 27-28**

### *County Council Special Session – FY2027 Budget Hearings*

Councilors present: Randall Ryti (Chair), Theresa Cull, Suzie Havemann, Melanee Hand, Ryn Herrmann, Beverly Neal-Clinton, David Reagor.

### **Adopted FY27 County Budget**

At the end of two days of public hearings, Council adopted a Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 expenditure budget totaling \$350.2M, including \$0.9M for two approved budget options. The vote was 6–1, with Councilor Reagor in opposition.

The adopted FY2027 budget is about \$18M less than last year's adopted budget, largely attributable to a \$13.6M decline in capital project funding.

Reagor said he opposed the budget requested by the Department of Public Utilities because he felt its contract with the Foxtail Flats Solar Project put the County at an

unacceptable financial risk. He also felt the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) budget in FY 2027 warranted more discussion. In particular, he questioned the need for an Emergency Operations Center.

Council approved reallocating \$1.4M in the CIP Fund to the North Mesa Bike Park, bringing the total project funding to \$1.9M. The vote was 5–2, with Councilors Cull and Neal-Clinton opposed.

## Revenues

County Manager Anne Laurent's opening remarks for the budget hearing summarized changes to the County's revenue stream, emphasizing Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) revenue.

GRT is the County's main source of funding, making up about 75% of General Fund revenue. Property taxes provide about 8%, with the remainder coming from fees, state and federal funding, and other sources. Because of the heavy reliance on GRT revenue, changes in the economy can directly affect County services, infrastructure, and long-term investments.

In recent years, GRT revenues have fluctuated in concert with changes in employment and construction activities at Los Alamos National Laboratory. After reaching a peak, collections declined and have since leveled off at lower amounts. In FY2025, GRT dropped by nearly 18%, and FY2026 is projected to come in about 4% below budget. While the County remains financially stable, this revenue shift requires adjustments to ensure long-term sustainability.

A previously approved 0.625% increase in the GRT rate will take effect on July 1, 2026, with FY2027 as the first full year of implementation. The intent is not to increase spending, but to stabilize finances by aligning ongoing costs with reliable revenue, supporting essential services, infrastructure, and key community priorities such as economic development, workforce housing, environmental sustainability, regional partnerships, employee wellness, and upkeep of County facilities and roads.

The FY2027 proposed budget also recommends increasing the targeted reserves of the unassigned General Fund balance from 20% to 25% to strengthen financial resilience and ensure continued support for critical services. Council approved this change to the County's existing financial policy.

## Budget Guidance to Department Heads

Laurent and Director of Administrative Services Helen Perraglio outlined the budget review process. County leadership developed the FY2027 budget starting from the adopted FY2026 budget, excluding one-time expenses. Departments were guided to plan for moderate increases in salaries and health costs, while reducing non-labor spending by about 10%.

Given inflation and economic uncertainty, departments were asked to focus only on essential needs, complete delayed projects, and prioritize maintaining existing assets and implementing already adopted plans (i.e., Climate Action Plan, ADA audit, master plans, etc.). Any new requests were expected to clearly support Council goals and community priorities, including affordable housing, economic development, and key capital projects.

## Adopted FY2027 Budget

The table below presents the adopted FY2027 departmental budgets. The FY2025 actual budget and FY2026 adopted budgets are provided for comparison, with a "Variance" column showing the percent change of the FY2027 budget relative to last year's budget.

The adopted budget aligns with the County Manager's guidance. Council approved nearly all departmental budgets unanimously. The budgets for the County Council and the Department of Public Utilities were approved by 6–1 votes, with Councilor Reagor voting in opposition.

Commentary is provided below for departments marked with an asterisk in the table, to account for large variances, budget option requests, new initiatives or focuses, and Councilor opposition.

## Adopted FY2027 County Budget

Note: The dollar amounts shown in this table were compiled by the League's observer from slides presented at the hearing by Department Directors and elected officials. The official amounts will be reported in the final adopted budget released by the County Finance Division.

Department	FY2025 Actual Budget (\$K)	FY2026 Adopted Budget (\$K)	FY2027 Adopted Budget (\$K)	Variance FY2027 vs FY2026
*County Council	362	445	689	55%
County Assessor	967	1,041	1,104	6%
County Clerk	1,267	1,334	1,413	6%
County Sheriff	17	18	19	5%
Municipal Court	824	909	946	4%
*Probate Court	5	8	19	125%
*County Manager's Office	19,514	25,468	25,135	-1%
County Attorney's Office	1,282	1,501	1,659	11%
*Administrative Services	13,938	22,433	17,267	-23%
*Community Development	16,119	17,971	18,525	3%
*Community Services	35,281	33,742	35,490	5%
Fire	50,536	56,472	58,258	3%
Police	16,205	17,986	20,113	12%
Public Works	44,790	69,548	64,367	-7%
*Public Utilities	95,328	108,740	95,588	-12%
Other Funds	4,823	10,549	8,179	-17%
REPORTED TOTALS	300,986	367,980	350,220	-5%

### County Council

The Council's requested budget was approved 6–1, with Reagor voting in opposition.

Councilor Reagor pointed out that, at \$503K, professional and contractual services made up 73% of the Council's \$689K budget and have more than doubled compared with

FY2025. He questioned the sharp increase, noting that "almost the whole budget is in one item, and there's no information on that page."

Deputy County Manager Linda Matteson replied that the rise is largely due to new contracts for state and federal lobbyists. The County's longtime state lobbyist stepped down, and its federal lobbyist left his position, prompting the Council to issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for replacements. The new agreements cost more than twice the previous contracts. Together, the two lobbying contracts total nearly \$250,000 annually.

Council did not approve the requested budget option to add \$37,350 to the Council's travel budget.

### Probate Court

The budget for the Probate Court more than doubled because of the salary increase for this position that Council approved last year.

### County Manager's Office

Council approved the budget option for \$15K to fund inclusivity training and other program costs associated with the newly formed Inclusivity Board.

### Administrative Services

Compliance with the Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA) requirements and the impact on the County's budget was a recurring theme during the hearing.

Perraglio said that the Records and Information Management (RIM) Division handles IPRA compliance and responds to public records requests in line with state law. The Division processed 3,625 IPRA requests in FY2026, resulting in the release of about 1.5 million records. She said last year's IPRA requests were about half of the number received in FY2025, but the hours to fulfill those requests nearly doubled. An external vendor was engaged to assist with high-volume requests and submitted over 5,000 billable hours.

Perraglio emphasized that no two IPRA requests are the same; some may take 2

hours, some 1,000 hours. She said she does not expect the overall workload to decline, even if raw request counts fluctuate.

To address this challenge, RIM is exploring Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to help search across large volumes of records/emails for IPRA requests more efficiently. This approach could potentially replace some contractual services with in-house capability without replacing staff, by using AI as a search/efficiency tool while humans still review and redact.

Police Chief Sgambellone echoed Perraglio's characterization of the need for assistance in fulfilling IPRA requests, calling it a County-wide issue. He said that over the last fiscal year, the Police Department responded to over 14,000 IPRA requests. He added, "you have to understand that a lot of our IPRA involves video, which is very labor-intensive to review and to redact. So, I echo any of those initiatives throughout the County that will help provide us a way through that."

County Clerk Michael Redondo reported that the Clerk's Office is also looking to use AI to speed up the process of indexing a backlog of about 140,000 historical records. He said that this project is 11% complete but will take 10 years to finish at the current rate. His office will be issuing a RFP next year that will likely include AI methodology.

Perraglio said that the Administrative Service Department (ASD) will be advancing AI governance and tools to support departments with balanced, efficient, and responsible use of emerging technologies.

The requested ASD budget was decreased to adjust for CIP funding (\$1.4M) that was reallocated to the North Mesa Bike Park. This project is included in the Community Services adopted budget.

## Community Development

Community Development Director Eli Isaacson presented information showing that over half of CDD's proposed budget for FY2027 (\$22.1M) is from its Economic Development Fund (\$12.4M). These expenditures primarily fund infrastructure and

housing programs (\$5.9M) and local Economic Development Loans or grants (\$4.9M).

Isaacson emphasized that the high budget requested for FY2027 would not be repeated in next year's budget request. He said the projected CDD budget for FY2028 (\$7.1M) was more representative of future budgets. It is about 68% less than that adopted for FY2027 due to a much lower budget for professional/contractual services and for expenditures from its Economic Development Fund.

## Community Services

The CSD budget for FY2027 (\$33.5M) is nearly the same as that for FY2026. An increased cemetery budget (\$1.0M) is due to needed renovations but this increase is offset by decreases in the other parts of the budget, such as for CIP projects.

The requested CSD budget was increased by the reallocation of CIP funds (\$1.4M) to the North Mesa Bike Park, bringing the total project funding in the FY2027 budget to \$1.9M. Another \$1.5M for the bike park project is included in the projected FY2028 budget. CSD Director Cory Styron said that staff would be sending out an RFP for bids on this project later this year.

## Public Utilities

The FY2027 budget (\$94.7M) requested by the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) was 13% lower than its FY2026 budget (\$108.7M). Public Utilities Director Philo Shelton attributed the decrease to three factors:

- Electric utilities: The decrease of \$9.2M is primarily due to decreases in purchased power costs, interdepartmental charges, and debt service expenditures.
- Gas utilities: The decrease of \$1.1M is due to a decrease in the cost of gas and the in-lieu taxes/franchise fee.
- Water utilities: The decrease of \$3.8M is primarily due to decreases in expenditures for capital improvement

projects for both water distribution and water production.

Council voted 6-1 to adopt the requested DPU budget, with Councilor Reagor in opposition. Reagor did not support the budget because he disapproved of the terms of the DPU contract with the Foxtail Flats Solar Project. The County has a power purchase agreement with Foxtail Flats to purchase 100 MW of energy as it is produced.

Reagor pointed out that the contract obligates the County to pay for an amount of energy that is far in excess of its need. He felt that this obligation could bankrupt the County if DPU was unsuccessful in establishing partnerships with other users to purchase the excess energy.

Shelton replied that the County is negotiating with the Laboratory through the Energy Coordination Agreement, and with Sandia and Kirtland, which will take about 25% of the load for their uses. Having these other partners will spread out any financial risk. Shelton felt confident that the negotiations would be successful.

Council approved the proposed budget option of \$900K for a joint DPU/PW project to repave Fairway Drive and to replace the associated utility infrastructure.

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## **Observer Corps Report – Planning and Zoning Commission – April 8**

Present: Karen Easton (Chair), Katherine Bruell, Robert Chrien, Rebecca Grimm, David Hampton, Ronald Nelson.

Absent: Commissioners Marlon Brown, Rebecca White.

## **Mari-Mac Mixed-Use Project**

The Commission unanimously (6–0) approved a one-year extension request from Greg Gonzales (dba Columbus Capital) for the previously adopted site plan for the Mari-Mac Mixed-Use Project, also known as the La Cumbre Project, located at 535 Central Avenue.

Originally approved on April 26, 2023, the site plan authorizes the development of a 104,671 square foot mixed-use project within the Downtown Los Alamos (DTLA) Zone District. The project includes 322 residential dwelling units and approximately 22,000 square feet of commercial space

In a letter to the Community Development Department, Gonzales stated the extension is needed to allow more time to move forward with the project. He cited challenges such as securing financing in a difficult real estate market, rising construction costs, and the need for additional coordination related to the Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) encompassing the site.

*June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin*

## **Observer Corps Report — Planning and Zoning Commission – April 22**

The meeting scheduled for April 22 was canceled due to the lack of quorum.

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

At Lunch with a Leader Robert Gibson, Chair of the Board of Public Utilities (BPU), spoke about “the nuts and bolts of our local utility system.” Los Alamos County owns and operates the four major utilities: Sewer, Water, Gas, and Electricity. That is rare for a county! The responsibility is assigned to the Department of Public Utilities (DPU). The DPU is a semiautonomous part of the County; it does not report directly to the Council, although some decisions, such as rate changes, require concurrence of Council. Instead, the manager of the DPU reports to the BPU, which sets the policies and oversees the operations.

More than one hundred people work in the DPU. The annual budget is over \$100 million. With a couple of exceptions, money does not flow between the General Fund and the DPU; within the department, each utility is financially separate. Except for a few capital grants, the only revenue comes from us, the ratepayers.



*Robert Gibson speaking at LWL. Photo by Maire O'Neill.*

### **Wastewater**

The County’s wastewater system is separate from that of the Lab. It is complicated because of the terrain. Although the system is fundamentally gravity-fed, two plants and about two dozen lift stations are required to make it work. By contrast, Santa Fe, with a much larger population, has four lift stations and just one plant.

The plant in Pueblo Canyon, which serves the townsite, is about 20 years old and is currently being refurbished. The White Rock plant, called the Water Resource Recovery Facility, is just two years old. Treated water from both plants is used to water Overlook Park, the golf course, and other public spaces in the County. Since the wastewater is not needed for irrigation in the winter, it is possible that in the future the Lab may use some of it for cooling.

Gibson remarked that sewer systems are long-lived. The major problem for the utility is blockages caused by grease and fibrous materials as well as tree roots. He warned, “Only three p’s should go down the toilet: pee, poop, and toilet paper.”

### **Water**

Unlike many parts of the state, Los Alamos County has no shortage of water. Thirteen wells draw our water from the aquifer 1500-3000 feet below the canyon bottoms. The pumped water passes through booster stations to storage tanks and then flows to homes by gravity.

Our water system was built as one system and operated by LANL until 1998. We own water rights to 5541.3 acre-feet per year, which are split with the Lab 70-30. So far neither entity is close to the limit. Use in the County is declining; however, Lab use is increasing due to expanding operations.

At present, one of the wells has been shut off due to contamination by hexavalent chromium. The DPU is considering drilling a well, possibly at Overlook Park, that would tap into our 1200’ of San Juan-Chama water rights. Of course, having water rights does not guarantee access to wet water!

### **Natural Gas**

The County’s gas distribution system is independent of the Lab’s and in good condition. The gas line in Elk Ridge Mobile Home Park, which belongs to the property owner, has not been well-

maintained. A new gas distribution system is being installed and will be turned over to the County when it has been completed.

Gibson remarked that “The problem with gas is not the hardware but the gas itself....Our goal is to phase out using gas by 2070, preferably earlier.” The DPU cannot do that alone. “We, all of us on the-planet, need your help in doing that to eliminate natural gas use.”

## Electricity (the most complicated set of issues)

Since 1985 the County and Lab have pooled electric generation resources based on a contract called the Electric Coordination Agreement. The contract expired last June, but negotiations are underway for a new one and Gibson expects it to be similar to the last one.

The County owns most of the supply, although the Lab uses almost 80% of the power. The total demand is about 70 megawatts (MW). Demand will probably double over the next 20 years as we electrify, it may even triple.

We have several sources for our electricity and they are evolving. The coal-burning San Juan Generating Station in Farmington has been demolished. Currently 20-40% of our power comes from dams, mostly out west, but it includes hydro-electric plants at El Vado and Abiquiu. The capacity has been reduced due to the lack of water. We also get power from the Laramie River Station in Wyoming, which burns coal. In addition, for the last couple of years we have used market purchases.

We are building a very large solar field at Foxtail Flats, north of Farmington. Groundbreaking will be on May 12, and construction will take a year. The array will produce 170 MW of power. We expect to use half of the output. Sandia Lab and Kirtland Air Force Base will purchase some of the power from us. We are also building a large battery plant to be able to provide electricity when the sun is not shining.

The DPU’s goal is to be carbon neutral by 2040, while maintaining a diversity of sources.

There are no transmission lines to bring wind power to us from the eastern part of the state. However, there is a major development underway. LANL will soon begin construction on a new line that will bring power across the Rio Grande to White Rock.

Gibson said that our distribution system is quite reliable; the average customer loses about one hour of power every year, much better than the national averages. However, the system is old, not sized for the increased demand we anticipate. To increase the capacity and redundancy, several projects are underway. In addition, the department will continue to inspect and replace the poles, making the wires larger. Also, automated controls will be installed so that problems can be fixed more rapidly.

Inflation and increased prices for utility equipment are driving up utility rates. Our gas, water, and electric rates are going to rise soon. There will be a change in the electric rate structure this summer. The peak rate will rise to \$0.19.7/kWh between 5 and 11 p.m. However, the rest of the day it will fall to \$0.11/kWh. (It’s currently about \$0.15/kWh). There will also be a demand charge: Users will pay \$1/kw for the highest usage hour. The purpose is to make people more aware of their use, to minimize the peaks, because the whole electric system must be sized for peak usage.

More detail is available at

<https://www.losalamosnm.gov/Services/Public-Utilities/Rates-and-Fees/Time-of-Use-and-Residential-Demand>.



Robert Gibson and Karyl Ann Armbruster. Photo by Leslie Wallstrom.

Barbara Calef

## ***An Insider's View of the County Health Council***

The Los Alamos County Health Council is a fifteen-member council tasked with advising the County concerning identification of needs, services, projects, and programs that can affect community health, comprehensive health planning, and coordination of health resources. Our Staff Liaison is Jessica Strong, Manager of the Social Services Division.

Unlike most other boards, we are mandated by the State via HB137, passed in 2019, and receive annual funding. This fiscal year we are receiving over \$110K. As a result of this mandate, we are able to advocate for community health and wellbeing, including: suicide and addiction prevention, affordable health care, mental and behavioral health treatment, low-cost housing and transportation, and help with food and financial insecurities. We work closely with other boards and commissions on these issues. This mission aligns with the newly adopted position of our local League.

In December 2024, the County Comprehensive Health Plan and Action Plan, was approved by County Council and is being implemented. Here is the link to the plan on the County website: <https://www.losalamosnm.gov/Health-and-Public-Safety/1CommunityHealth/Comprehensive-Health-Plan>

In September 2025, the Health Council unanimously approved the report of the Community Health Action Center Working Group, defining requirements and recommendations to guide the development of a co-located, multi-purpose healthcare facility for Social Services and other community health-related organizations.

Health Council terms are two years long, with two terms allowed. We meet on the first Thursday of each month from noon -1:30 pm in the Municipal Building and on Zoom, except in the month of July. To get a feel for our meetings, you can watch the video recordings (recommended!) at <https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx> The May meeting has been cancelled, so the next meeting will be on June 4. May is Mental Health Awareness Month and many activities and trainings are available for the community.

I'm serving my second term on the Health Council and second term as Chair. We currently have three Democrat openings for council members. If you are interested, please apply through the County website: <https://www.losalamosnm.us/Government/Leadership/Boards-Commissions>

*Lisa Hampton, Chair*



*2026-2027 Board: Barbara Calef, Bob Williams, Susannah Rousculp, Cynthia Biddlecomb, Leslie Wallstrom, Karyl Ann Armbruster, Jody Benson, Lisa Hampton, Wendy Swanson, Becky Shankland, Marianne Wilkerson, Felicia Orth, June Fabryka-Martin. Photo by Maire O'Neill.*

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

## **Minutes**

**Thursday, April 16, 2026  
Fellowship Hall of the Unitarian Church  
1738 North Sage Loop  
Los Alamos, New Mexico**

### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 1:23 P.M. with 38 members in attendance. The required quorum of 15% of the total membership was confirmed, allowing the meeting to proceed. The meeting was chaired by Felicia Orth, President of the Los Alamos League.

### **Minutes of the 2025 Meeting (published in the May 2025 Update)**

The minutes of the 2025 Annual Meeting were recorded by Cecile Hemez, Secretary. The readers for the 2025 Annual Meeting minutes were Maire O'Neill and June Fabryka-Martin. The 2025 minutes were accepted as published.

Maire O'Neill and June Fabryka-Martin volunteered to be the readers for the 2026 Annual Meeting minutes.

### **President's Report**

Felicia Orth thanked the League's members for their commitment to protecting and defending our democracy. She also highlighted the League's work to expand voter participation, including hosting candidate forums, producing the Voter Guide, and registering new voters.

### **Membership Report**

The Los Alamos League had 120 members as of April 15, 2026.

Karyl Ann Armbruster asked the audience whether anyone was not receiving information about Lunch with a Leader. No one responded affirmatively.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Adelaide Jacobson reported that the Los Alamos League is in good financial standing. She thanked Lisa Hampton for heading the Budget Committee.

### **Voter Services**

Lynn Jones announced that the Voter Guide for the 2026 primary election will be distributed by *The Daily Post* on April 30 and will also be available on the League's website. The guide will include information about the semi-open primary system. The League will also issue a Voter Guide in October 2026, ahead of the November 3 general election.

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

Recommendations from the Program Planning meeting, held February 1, and subsequent Board actions:

- Replace the Indigent Health Care Fund position with a new health care position. The Board presented the new position it adopted through concurrence with the Santa Fe County League's Community Health position. Becky Shankland moved to adopt the position. Karyl Ann Armbruster seconded. The motion carried unanimously.
- Re-adopt the Sustainability, Public Transportation, Environment, Sustainable Water, Fuller Lodge, Land Use and Transportation: Residential Neighborhoods, Education and Digital Privacy positions. Jody Benson moved to re-adopt the positions. Jeannette Mortensen seconded. The motion carried unanimously.
- National positions remained unchanged. The Los Alamos League sent messages to LWVUS in support of considering concurrence with the separation of church and state and religious freedom position of LWV Colorado and of the protection of immigrant rights position of LWV Washington. League members at the Program Planning meeting stressed the urgency of protecting voting rights.
- The group voted unanimously to adopt a Board-approved League study on converting waste to energy. Barbara Calef will lead the study. A Friendly Reminder will present the scope of the study and invite members to participate. Several members have already expressed interest.

The Health Care Forum, held on February 24 and sponsored by the League, Los Alamos Community Foundation, and Anchorum, was well attended.

The zoning changes proposed by the League have still not been considered by the County Council.

The League developed a flyer to inform the public about semi-open primary elections. Jody Benson called for volunteers to post the flyer in public spaces, including churches. Karyl Ann Armbruster suggested also contacting the high school.

Wendy Swanson moved to adopt the program. Addie Jacobson seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Primary elections information:

- Voter Guides will be distributed April 30
- The Candidate Forum will be held April 30, 6:30 P.M., at the Student Center of UNM-LA. Seven candidates for County Council and two for sheriff will participate.
- Early voting starts May 5
- General election is June 2

### **Adoption of the FY 2026-27 Budget**

Lisa Hampton, head of the Budget Committee, presented the proposed budgets for FY 27 (05/01/2026 to 04/30/2027) and FY 28 (05/01/2027 to 04/30/2028).

June Fabryka-Martin asked why the proposed budget for FY 28 was lower than for previous years, given the upcoming 2028 General Election. Lisa Hampton answered that the overall expenses for FY 28 will be lower because there will not be a national convention in FY 28. The Voter Guide for the 2028 general election will be included in the FY 29 budget.

Maire O'Neill moved to accept the FY 2026-27 Budget as presented. Barbara Calef seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Election of Officers and Directors**

The Slate of Officers and Directors for 2026-2027 was presented by Ellen Mills, representing the Nominating Committee, composed of Ellen Mills and Ed Santiago:

- Officers:

- President: Leslie Wallstrom
- 1st Vice-President/President Elect: *open*
- 2nd Vice-President: June Fabryka-Martin
- Secretary: Marianne Wilkerson
- Co-Treasurers: Susannah Rousculp and Julie Williams-Hill
- Past President: Felicia Orth
- Directors:
- Lunch with a Leader: Karyl Ann Armbruster, assisted by Elaine Deschamp
- Membership: Barbara Calef
- Publicity: Jody Benson
- Voter Service/Voter Guide: Cynthia Biddlecomb
- Community Health and Wellbeing: Lisa Hampton
- Reservations and Refreshments: Wendy Swanson, assisted by Ellen Mills
- Communications: Becky Shankland, Karyl Ann Armbruster
- Newsletter Publisher/Archivist: Bob Williams
- Nominating Committee: Ellen Mills, Ed Santiago
- Off-Board Directors (vote by membership not required):
- Website/Social Media: Helena Whyte, Madhavi Garimella
- Observer Corps: June Fabryka-Martin, Craig Martin, Maire O'Neill
- Fundraising: Ellen Mills
- Video: Ed Santiago
- Newsletter Editors: Barbara Calef, Rebecca Shankland
- Newsletter Distribution: Jeannette Mortensen
- Budget Committee: Lisa Hampton (Chair), Julie Williams-Hill, Jeffrey Howell
- Voter Guide Committee: Lynn Jones, Marianne Wilkerson, Susannah Rousculp

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

Leslie Wallstrom thanked outgoing President Felicia Orth for her three-year term and presented her a gift on behalf of the Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:10 P.M.

Minutes drafted by Cecile Hemez  
 Reviewed by readers June Fabryka-Martin and Maire O'Neill  
 Edited with comments from Barbara Calef and Jody Benson  
 Approved by the Board on 04/23/26



**LWV** LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF LOS ALAMOS

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Partner\*: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone 1: \_\_\_\_\_  
(cellular phone)

Phone 2: \_\_\_\_\_  
(other phone)

E-mail (required): \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Newsletter:** How do you want to receive the *Update* newsletter:

email it as a PDF file       mail a hard copy       no newsletter

Check here to receive occasional Friendly Reminders of upcoming events by e-mail.

**Ways to help the League if you wish to be an active member** (check as many as apply)

Advocate for League positions: communicate with local, state, and federal leaders.

Serve on the LWV-Los Alamos Board

Observer Corps: Watch Council, DPU, P&Z meetings etc. and write a summary to publish in our newsletter. (All meetings are recorded, so you can watch them later.)

Fundraising – Assist in raising money for LWVLA.

Voter Guide – Assist in developing the Guide – edit, develop questions, work with news publications, etc

Lunch with a Leader – order/deliver lunches when we meet in person; help set up tables.

Newsletter – Write newsletter articles on a local issue or League activity for the *Update*.

Organize/provide refreshments for forums and other in-person meetings.

Publicity – Submit press releases to local media.

Voter registration – Register voters at events such as the Farmers Market (with training by the County Clerk's office).

Website / Social Media – Provide technical assistance and develop content.

Another area (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

\* Optional – another LWVLA member in the same household.

*The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

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