LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF LOS ALAMOS

UPDATE

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Calendar

November 19	Lunch with a Leader, Lt. Governor Howie Morales, Unitarian Church, 11:45 a.m.
December 3	Board meeting, Unitarian Church, noon
December 9	Action/Advocacy Committee meeting, 6:30 p.m. via Zoom (The LWVNM Board voted to change the name of the Action Committee to the Advocacy Committee.)
January 9	Advocacy Workshop, 10 a.m. to noon via Zoom
February 4	LWVNM will have a table at the Legislature
February 10	Legislative Reception, 5:30 to 7 p.m. at La Fonda
February 11	League Day at the Legislature, 9:30 to 12:30 - Location TBD

Lunch with a Leader: Lt. Governor Howie Morales



Lt. Governor Howie Morales. Courtesy Wikipedia.

Lt. Governor Howie Morales will be the speaker for Lunch with a Leader on November 19. The meeting will be held in the Fellowship Hall of the Unitarian Church from 11:45-1 p.m. He has been Lt. Governor since his election in 2019 with Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Morales was raised in Silver City. His father was a copper miner and his mother was an educational assistant in the schools. He earned a BA and MA in bilingual special education and later earned a PhD in curriculum and instruction from NMSU. He was a special education teacher, a transition coordinator for the Cobre School District, and then the education administrator at Gila Regional Medical Center. In 2017 he was inducted into the NMHS Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame, and a baseball stadium in Bayard, NM is named in his honor!

Morales entered politics when he was elected Grant County Clerk in 2004. After the death of NM State Senator Altamirano in 2007, Governor Bill Richardson appointed him to fill the position. He ran for that office and won the seat in 2008 and again in 2012. During his time as Senator, he became a hospital administrator.

During his 11 years in the Senate, Morales sponsored legislation to create a universal state-level single payer healthcare system, strongly opposed standardized testing via the PARCC assessment that Gov. Martinez instituted, and questioned the A-F grading for schools. He sponsored legislation to substantially increase the tax on cigarettes, vaping, and tobacco products in order to generate additional funds for public schools and sought to create a cabinet level early childhood education program that became the NM Early Childhood Education and Care Department under Gov. Lujan Grisham. On environmental issues, he strongly opposed the federal plans to divert the Gila River in western New Mexico.

Karyl Ann Armbruster

President's Message: Governing Now Begins

By the time you read this the election will be over, and the hard work of governing will soon begin. I hope you all showed up to make your voice count this year. The League believes that free, fair, safe, accessible, and respected elections are a bedrock of democracy. And that active and informed citizen participation in the political and electoral process is essential to the proper functioning of government. That is why the League started the *VOTE411.org* website twenty years ago. This site was used by at least 9.2 million voters in 2024 for information about crucial election day choices.

Your National League also partners with Election Hero Day, observed every October, which commemorates the hard work provided by all poll workers, County and State Election Clerks and their staff, and State Election Officials who ensure smooth running elections. Don't forget we also celebrate all the local League volunteers who table at various events through the year to educate and register potential voters. As Celina Stewart, CEO of the national League says, "Democracy doesn't run itself. It depends on everyday Americans who show up, serve their communities, and protect our freedom to vote, often in the face of intimidation and political pressure."

The election is over - now our advocacy season will begin in January when newly elected officials take office. Once again, we will advocate for policies that our members have carefully considered important for our state and nation. Mark your calendars for January 7, 2027, for the Legislative Preview in Los Alamos and February 11, 2027, for League Day at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe. I hope to see you all there!

Leslie Wallstrom

2026 General Election Candidate Forum

The League's candidate forum was held at UNM-LA on October 1. Twelve of the fourteen local candidates participated. Eric Stromberg was out of town and Antonio Maggiore was working. Three members of the Hilltalkers served as time keepers, and Past President Felicia Orth was the moderator.



Felicia Oth with County Assessor Candidates Jeff Casalina and James Wernicke. Photo by Maire O'Neill.



Audience at the Forum. Photo by Maire O'Neill



Hilltalkers Suchir Jha, Lucia Rudin, and Eliana Padilla with Felicia Orth. Photo by Maire O'Neill

Observer Corps Report — County Council – October 6

Regional Cell and Internet Outage, MRA Funding for Pig and Fig Bakery, Energy Communities Alliance (ECA) Cleanup Workshop

Attending were Chair Randall Ryti, Vice Chair Ryn Herrmann, and Councilors Theresa Cull, Melanee Hand, Beverly Neal-Clinton, and David Reagor. Councilor Havemann was absent.

Regional Cell and Internet Outage

Jerry Smith, Broadband Manager, and other County Staff briefed Council on the recent regional cell and internet outage. The September 24 outage exposed communication limits while County emergency systems and first responders largely remained operational.

Outage Cause and County Response

Smith attributed the outage to a road grader damaging Lumen fiber near the old Buckman Road area across the river. Service was down for roughly 20 hours. Smith cautioned that, "This information is best effort. Luman doesn't share, doesn't make the information public."

Cody Ulrich, Deputy Emergency Manager, said the County used the emergency alert system Everbridge, the AM 1610 radio station, road signs, and A-frame signs to provide information to the public during the outage. Everbridge reach was limited while cellular and internet services were down. The AM radio station was the most effective public channel.

Kate Stoddard, Consolidated Dispatch Manager, emphasized that 911 service remained operational. She said that the analog 10-digit non-emergency line and responder radios also remained available. She noted that community residents without a backup wireless program or satellite connectivity may not have been able to call 911.

Network Redundancy

Smith provided updates on two major fiber projects intended to provide redundancy: the San Ildefonso fiber line and the County's Atomic Fiber project. The Atomic Fiber project is currently under construction in White Rock and is expected to be complete throughout the County in three years. The separate 11-mile San Ildefonso Pueblo fiber line has been installed from White Rock to Pojoaque High School but splicing, testing, electronics, and a County-Pueblo MOU remain outstanding.

Smith said that Atomic Fiber will be the first user of the Pueblo line. As phases of the Atomic Fiber project are completed, that chunk of the network will be made available to customers to take advantage of having network service over redundant lines.

Smith noted that no existing providers—such as Verizon, Comcast, and Lumen—have yet committed to using the second line, which is owned and operated by San Ildefonso. Lumen discussed a possible agreement with the Pueblo that, if achieved, could provide redundancy for services dependent on Lumen. He said that, if Lumen has two lines, that would solve a lot of the outage problems.

Smith said that the County is also exploring a third route to provide additional redundancy. One opportunity is provided by LANL's power project, which will bring another power line into the County. Smith is also investigating an alternative route along NM 4 and US 550 through the Jemez Mountains. Neither of these is a firm project or has funding.

Remaining Gaps

Ulrich identified employee communication checklists, a Microsoft Teams coordination channel, and better readiness planning at County buildings as lessons learned from the outage. Linda Matteson, Deputy County Manager, added that the outage also revealed a capacity issue with public WiFi made available at the White Rock Library, which limited the number of people who could connect to the service there.

Ulrich emphasized the need to encourage community members to learn how to do Wi-Fi

calling on their cellphones and to use the satellite messaging function if available.

MRA Grant to Pig and Fig Bakery

The Council unanimously (6–0) approved a Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) project agreement for Pig and Fig Bakery in White Rock. The business requested a $106,000 grant to remodel underused commercial space and expand its services. The project is expected to generate more than $360,000 in taxable construction activity, along with additional gross receipts tax revenue from food and beverage sales over the three-year agreement.

Energy Communities Alliance (ECA) Cleanup Workshop

Danielle Duran, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, and Councilors Ryti and Herrmann reported on the 2026 ECA Cleanup Workshop in Arlington, Virginia. This annual conference focuses on issues relating to legacy waste and new nuclear activities, and efforts by the DOE for cleanup and community support.

Duran highlighted the workshop's alignment with the current Administration's priorities, particularly nuclear waste cleanup and repurposing DOE property for economic development, including data centers. This shift in priorities is also reflected in the proposed renaming of DOE Environmental Management (EM) to DOE Nuclear Restoration and Revitalization (NRR).

Duran reported that DOE-EM and the New Mexico Environment Department are moving forward with restarting the interim measures to address the hexavalent chromium plume. Initially, pumped groundwater will be applied to land until colder weather arrives. Afterward, the plan is to reinject treated groundwater away from the plume, rather than back into it as has been done in the past.

The Governor and Lieutenant Governor of San Ildefonso also attended the ECA workshop as guests. Duran, along with Councilors Ryti and Herrmann, emphasized the unprecedented collaboration between the County and Pueblo on addressing the hexavalent chromium plume. Both parties agreed to jointly advocate for progress on the hexavalent chromium plume with their congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. The Pueblo expressed willingness to explore future partnerships on other policy issues and environmental cleanup efforts to strengthen our collective voice.

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report — County Council – October 20

Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability Initiatives; Using Data to Drive Decision-Making at Social Services Division

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

Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability Initiatives

David Hampton, Chair of the Environmental Sustainability Board, and Angelica Gurule, Sustainability Manager, presented the County's accomplishments over the past year and outlined planned initiatives. Their presentation prompted an extended discussion among Council members.

Gurule explained that the County's environmental sustainability efforts focus on four key areas: natural resource protection, water conservation, climate action and resiliency, and waste management.

Natural Resources

Gurule highlighted several accomplishments in natural resource protection, including the establishment of pollinator gardens at 150 properties and the addition of 7,000 square feet of pollinator habitat at the Golf Course. She also reported that a draft wildlife assessment is expected in January. In addition, the County is expanding its use of robotic mowers beyond the Golf Course to include additional sports fields.

Gurule noted that the County's new arborist will assist in updating the tree mitigation and preservation policy, with particular attention to protecting trees during County construction projects. An updated policy is expected to come before Council for consideration early next year and will be structured to support grant reimbursements and access to other external funding opportunities.

Gurule reported that the County has distributed 2,398 bear-resistant trash carts, including more than 2,200 in the Townsite and 114 in White Rock. Another 495 residents are on the waiting list, and an additional 594 carts are being delivered. Once those orders are filled, the County expects to have approximately 100 carts remaining. However, limited storage space at the Eco Station restricts the number of carts the County can keep in inventory.

Water and Climate

Gurule reported that the County recently welcomed a new Energy and Water Conservation Coordinator and continues to provide water conservation education through the Pajarito Environmental Education Center (PEEC). The County is also updating its long-range water supply plan and its water and energy conservation plans.

She said implementation of the Climate Action Plan has moved beyond the planning stage, with investments now being made in cleaner transportation. The County has completed fleet and community electric vehicle (EV) plans and made substantial progress toward implementing them. The County fleet currently includes 16 electric vehicles and three plug-in hybrids, with five additional EVs planned for fiscal year 2027.

Another area of focus is expanding access to home weatherization and electrification assistance. Gurule said the County is exploring financing options for residential energy-efficiency improvements, including whether such a program would be permissible under the state's anti-donation clause. Meanwhile, Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) financing is available to support energy-efficiency improvements in commercial properties.

Waste Management

Gurule said the County's progress in waste management is reflected in the results of a recent recycling contamination audit, which found a contamination rate of approximately 18%, compared with the reported national average of 24%.

The County is also evaluating regional waste disposal alternatives to help manage long-term costs, while food-waste composting proposals are under consideration.

Additionally, Gurule reported that the County is participating in a statewide extended producer responsibility initiative aimed at improving recycling and disposal options for difficult-to-recycle materials, including mattresses and batteries. The initiative seeks to shift greater responsibility for managing these materials from consumers and local governments to manufacturers.

Council Discussion

Councilor Hand asked whether the County plans to update its Climate Action Plan. Gurule explained that the plan, adopted in 2024, is still in the implementation phase and that no revisions are currently planned. The next greenhouse gas inventory is expected to be conducted in three to five years, unless significant changes in population or energy sources warrant an earlier assessment.

Councilors Cull and Ryti raised concerns about the cost of EV charging at County facilities, noting that current rates offer users relatively little savings compared with the cost of gasoline. Councilor Ryti acknowledged that the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) operates its services as an Enterprise Fund, meaning revenues are expected to cover operating costs. However, he suggested that lowering EV charging rates could provide a greater incentive for residents to transition to electric vehicles.

Assistant County Manager Linda Matteson explained that the current charging rates are structured to generate sufficient revenue to fund future equipment replacements.

Councilor Ryti asked about the moratorium on bulk disposal at the Eco Station. Martinez clarified that the restriction applies to large quantities of asphalt and concrete brought in by contractors. He explained that two areas of the transfer station are subject to New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) oversight: the closure plan for the former landfill and the operating permit for the transfer station. Martinez said that, as part of the permit renewal process, the County must assess the affected area and make any necessary improvements before resuming operations in the section used to collect and process concrete and asphalt. The moratorium will remain in place pending NMED's review of the landfill cap and the County's permit-related proposals.

Using Data to Drive Decision-Making at Social Services Division

Jessica Strong, Social Services Manager, reviewed the types of data collected by the Social Services Division and how the data are used to measure community needs, service outcomes, and trust, while protecting client privacy.

Overview of Social Services Programs

Strong described the division’s role in connecting Los Alamos residents with the basic necessities to live and thrive, including food, housing, income supports, and physical and behavioral health services. The division's network includes County and community-based service providers, regional and state partners, federal opioid settlement initiatives, and outreach and training programs.

Strong reported that the division uses Unite Us, a closed-loop referral system, to coordinate services and track client needs. The system currently contains about 1,900 individual records within the County. During the last three months, 76 people had a total of 118 appointments, with approximately 25% returning for multiple appointments. About half of those served were between 18 and 44 years old, while the other half were over 45.

Strong said that the division was assisting 13 people who were not stably housed. A broader estimate developed with community partners in 2024 placed the number of people experiencing housing instability at approximately 70 to 80. Strong noted that estimating the number is challenging because the County does not have established encampments or regular gathering places where people experiencing homelessness can be readily identified.

She said that over the past 24 months, the division had helped seven people secure housing or other stable living arrangements. Outcomes included two individuals moving into apartments with Section 8 housing vouchers, one finding an apartment through community connections, one reuniting with family out of state, and one entering substance-use treatment in Taos.

Strong also outlined several factors affecting homelessness and housing stability in the County. These include a national shortage of housing vouchers, particularly Section 8 vouchers, and broader changes within the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). She noted that a pause in SNAP benefits instituted last November had recently been lifted, although additional changes to both SNAP and Medicaid were anticipated beginning January 1. Ongoing fluctuations in apartment availability are also affecting housing options for residents.

Privacy and Access to Services

Strong emphasized that the Social Services Division maintains the confidentiality of client information and does not share it with employers, including Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Information can only be shared outside the division with a client's written release, subject to limited confidentiality exceptions when there is concern that an individual may harm themselves or others.

She described the division's collaborations with LANL Occupational Medicine (OccMed) and its outreach efforts through community locations and organizations, including libraries, the Family Strengths Network, courts, and the Farmers' Market. During public comment, speakers emphasized the value of these partnerships and suggested that referrals to services in other communities, as well as gaps in connections to hospital resources, could help identify unmet needs.

Strong also addressed concerns about the potential impact of seeking mental health or substance-use assistance on LANL security clearances. She said LANL OccMed and other Laboratory staff assure employees that seeking help for these issues will not result in the loss of their clearance.

During public comment, Britney St. Jacques noted that LANL has made significant efforts over the past five years to address and reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health care. She observed that more than half of the Laboratory's workforce has been employed there for fewer than five years and that the stigma has not carried over to the younger and newer employees. However, she acknowledged that negative perceptions about seeking mental health services persist among some more senior staff.

Measuring Outcomes

Strong reviewed the Social Services Division's existing performance measures, which are reported on the County's Performance Dashboard under Quality of Life. These include the number of referrals completed through the Unite Us network, the number of existing and new Social Services clients, the range of social services contracts, and progress toward establishing a Community Health Action Center.

She explained that measuring outcomes and attributing results to individual interventions can be difficult, particularly when evaluating prevention efforts. Stigma, underreporting, and the challenge of measuring negative outcomes that were prevented all affect the quality of available data. Strong said that information about client satisfaction and progress toward individuals' own goals would provide valuable insight into the division's effectiveness.

Strong asked Council members for suggestions on performance measures that could better inform decision-making. She raised several questions: Where should the division invest additional resources? How can client satisfaction be measured? How can the impact of a specific intervention be determined? She also noted that the division does not always know whether its involvement ultimately resolved a client's problem.

As an example of the challenges involved in evaluating outcomes, Strong cited the nationwide decline in opioid-related deaths.

Public health researchers have identified several possible contributing factors, including investments in harm-reduction strategies such as Narcan, fewer contaminated or particularly dangerous batches of opioids entering the country, increased bystander and overdose-response training, and the presence of prevention specialists in schools. She noted that the decline may reflect the combined effects of multiple interventions rather than any single effort.

Suggested Performance Metrics

Councilor Cull acknowledged the difficulty of developing meaningful performance measures, noting that metrics must be measurable and connected to actions that could produce improvements.

Council members suggested several potential measures for further consideration, including:

- Wait times for appointments and access to services;
- Tracking whether client cases have known or unknown outcomes;
- Police reports and data related to suicide, substance abuse, and homelessness;
- Comparisons of suicide and homelessness rates with those of other communities; and
- Coordination, referrals, and collaboration among County departments and community service providers.

The discussion highlighted the importance of developing performance measures that not only track the division's activities but also help determine whether services are making a measurable difference in residents' lives.

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report — County Council – October 27

Los Alamos Medical Center Update; LEDA and MRA Funding for Rehabilitation and Conversion of Former CB Fox Building; Support for Fix Our Forests Act; NMED Attendance at Hexavalent Chromium Plume Meetings

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

Los Alamos Medical Center Update

Michael Covert, the new CEO of Los Alamos Medical Center (LAMC), briefed the Council on the hospital's operations, financial performance, service priorities, and community concerns. Covert was appointed CEO on May 21, 2026, and assumed the position on June 15. He replaces Bob Singletary, who had served as interim CEO since March.

Operations and Finances

Covert reported that LAMC handles approximately 500 to 550 hospital admissions annually, with an average patient stay of about three days. The facility also performs nearly 1,000 surgeries and records approximately 42,000 outpatient visits each year. About 72% of its outpatient visits come from the local and secondary service areas. The hospital recorded approximately 7,200 emergency visits last year and is now averaging about 650 visits per month.

Covert provided a breakdown of LAMC staff. It employs approximately 200 to 220 people, including 27 full-time nurses, 14 contract nurses, three employed physicians, and two midwives. This count excludes physicians who maintain private practices housed at LAMC.

The hospital also has access to 32 telehealth physicians across several specialties, including five cardiologists, 17 psychiatrists, and 10 neurologists. In addition,

20 radiologists provide services to the facility, along with physicians representing 41 specialties in the Emergency Department.

Covert described LAMC as financially sound, reporting approximately $63 million in net revenue and $46 million in expenses. Expenses include $25 million in employee wages, $5.3 million for taxes, and $3.8 million for charity care. Although it is a for-profit facility, the hospital is currently reinvesting $12 million of its net income in facility improvements and services.

Regarding its payer mix, Covert said approximately half of patient revenue comes from Blue Cross Blue Shield, with the other half coming from Medicare.

Services and Investments

Covert said that LAMC's growth priorities include expanding primary care and strengthening specialty services in cardiology, orthopedics, gastroenterology, urology, dermatology, allergy, and pulmonology. The hospital also plans to improve the consistency of physician coverage in the Emergency Department.

Covert emphasized the need for additional primary care providers, estimating that the hospital could use at least four more physicians in that area.

Several equipment upgrades are planned. A new MRI machine is expected to arrive in December, with another CT scanner and additional radiology equipment also planned. Facility improvements include air-conditioning repairs and upgrades to inpatient rooms.

Changes to Labor and Delivery Services

LAMC has ended traditional hospital-based labor and delivery services. Three OB/GYN physicians will be leaving their full-time hospital positions, although outpatient women's health services will continue through clinics staffed by nurse practitioners and midwives.

Covert cited low birth volume as a primary factor in the decision, noting that the hospital recorded only three births over a four- to five-month period.

Councilor Questions

Councilor Neal-Clinton raised concerns about nurse compensation, noting that sources she had spoken with described LAMC's wages as feeling like they were "racing to the bottom." Covert responded that the hospital had increased nursing wages by more than 10% in recent weeks and was continuing efforts to improve its compensation program.

Neal-Clinton also questioned whether telehealth services were an appropriate alternative for some older residents who may be less comfortable receiving care remotely. Covert explained that LAMC had turned to telehealth because of difficulties recruiting and retaining specialists locally, as well as limited patient volumes that made it challenging to attract physicians to practice in Los Alamos rather than in larger markets such as Albuquerque or Santa Fe.

Councilor Havemann emphasized the importance of healthcare to the community and asked how County government, the Council, other elected officials, and community institutions could better support the medical center.

Covert identified housing as a significant barrier to recruiting physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. He also asked the County to help identify the community's healthcare needs and priorities while also working to address housing challenges that affect recruitment and retention.

Councilor Ryti suggested that the Council consider adopting an ordinance allowing medical provider representation on the County Health Council.

LEDA Funding Support for 1735 Central Investment LLC

The Council voted unanimously to advance amendments to a proposed Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) agreement with 1735 Central Investment LLC, which is seeking $6 million in County assistance to redevelop the former CB Fox Building at 1735 Central Avenue.

The proposed $18 million project would transform the long-vacant downtown property into a mixed-use development featuring a hotel, restaurant and retail space.

Council considered amendments to the draft agreement intended to correct inconsistencies and errors in the original document. The changes also extend the project completion deadline from December 31, 2028, to June 30, 2029.

Following the unanimous vote, Council directed that an amended ordinance be brought back for possible ratification on November 17.

$6 Million in County Assistance Requested

According to a County staff report, 1735 Central Investment LLC is requesting $6 million from the County's Economic Development Fund. The proposed assistance consists of a $4 million grant and a $2 million, 10-year, zero-interest loan, with loan repayment scheduled to begin in the fourth year.

The development partnership includes local residents Phil Gursky, commercial realtor Jyl De Haven and property owner Matt Miles, along with Chicago-based investors Steve Miszkowicz and Josh Silverman. Plans call for a 20-room hotel, along with restaurant and retail operations intended to contribute to downtown activity.

The company's initial LEDA application was submitted December 31, 2025. A participation agreement was subsequently developed through collaboration between the investors and Los Alamos County.

During the Council discussion, Gursky emphasized the substantial investment required to rehabilitate the former CB Fox Building, which has been vacant for an extended period.

He said the adaptive reuse project would require significant infrastructure improvements, including replacement of mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. Gursky also told Council that the project would not move forward without financial assistance from the County.

Projected Jobs, Revenue and Hotel Capacity

Over the 10-year LEDA agreement, the development is projected to generate approximately 25 full-time-equivalent jobs and between $5 million and $6 million in combined annual revenue.

Councilors questioned Gursky about the project's financial projections, the development team's hotel experience, workforce availability and the potential impact on businesses already operating in Los Alamos.

Public Questions About Economic Benefits

Public comments reflected differing views about the project's potential benefits and its assumptions regarding unmet market demand.

Some residents questioned whether the projected demand for additional hotel, restaurant and retail services was sufficient to support the development. Others raised concerns about the possibility of diverting customers and employees from existing businesses, as well as the potential for additional vacant retail space if the new commercial operations struggled.

Supporters pointed to persistent vacancies in the downtown area, limited lodging options and a need for additional event-related capacity. They argued that a hotel and complementary businesses could attract visitors, support tourism and bring additional economic activity to Central Avenue.

Support for the Fix Our Forests Act

The Los Alamos County Council unanimously voted to support the bipartisan Fix Our Forests Act (FOFA), with additional safeguards to strengthen environmental protections and community involvement. The Council’s approval authorizes Fire Chief Erik Litzenberg to submit his opinion piece about the legislation for publication.

Forest Legislation

Litzenberg outlined the primary goals and provisions of the Fix Our Forests Act, which aims to accelerate forest management, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, and

streamline environmental reviews on federal and Tribal lands.

The proposed legislation includes several key initiatives:

- Identifying and prioritizing firesheds;
- Coordinating grant programs;
- Promoting collaboration through shared stewardship;
- Expanding scientific research and resources;
- Establishing a national intelligence center; and
- Creating a community wildfire risk reduction program.

Litzenberg emphasized that although the Act would establish national priorities for fireshed management, decisions about implementation would remain at the local level. The legislation would also improve access to essential resources, including funding, data, and intelligence, to support effective fireshed management.

He clarified that a fireshed encompasses areas beyond a community or watershed that may contribute to wildfire risk. Los Alamos County is part of a larger fireshed extending beyond County boundaries and including portions of the Valles Caldera and Jemez region.

Council Action and Additional Safeguards

During the discussion, Councilor Ryti raised concerns about provisions allowing categorical exclusions to expedite certain environmental reviews, as well as expanded administrative authority.

In response, Ryti's motion called for additional safeguards to ensure adequate environmental protections, meaningful community participation, judicial accountability, and sufficient federal funding and staffing.

The Council unanimously approved the motion, supporting the Fix Our Forests Act while emphasizing the importance of maintaining environmental oversight and local involvement in decisions affecting surrounding forests and communities.

Hexavalent Chromium Plume Cleanup

The Council voted 6–1 to approve sending a letter to New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, requesting that she direct the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) to provide adequate staffing for multi-stakeholder meetings concerning the hexavalent chromium plume cleanup.

Councilor Ryti referenced a recent meeting that NMED representatives failed to attend and noted that San Ildefonso Pueblo had already sent a letter to the Governor expressing its concerns.

Intergovernmental Affairs Manager Danielle Duran explained that the proposed letter would outline the history of the multi-stakeholder meetings, address NMED's recent absence, and emphasize the importance of maintaining technical progress on the cleanup effort. She noted that NMED's participation is essential for advancing major technical decisions. County staff said that further delays in addressing major project milestones are not in the best interests of Los Alamos residents, commuters, surrounding communities, the groundwater supply, or the broader ecosystem.

Councilor Reagor voted against the motion, expressing reluctance to approve sending a letter without first having an opportunity to review its final wording.

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report - Planning and Zoning Commission – October 7

The session was attended by Commissioners Karen Easton (Chair), Jennifer Best, Marlon Brown, Katherine Bruell, Robert Chrien, Rebecca Grimm, David Hampton, and Ronald Nelson. Commissioner Rebecca White was absent.

Draft Los Alamos County Comprehensive Plan Update

Peter Lombardi of CZB LLC summarized proposed revisions to the August 19 draft Comprehensive Plan based on public and commissioner feedback from the Commission's meeting on September 23.

Changes to the Previous Draft Plan

Lombardi outlined revisions made to the previous draft plan:

- remove conservation residential recommendations, and clarify that open space should not be developed,
- strengthen Development Code recommendations for by-right housing diversity;
- replace neighborhood-character language;
- contextualize “stuck” and “risk-averse”;
- add nuance to population and employment forecasts;
- better integrate centers, neighborhoods, and open space;
- identify specific parcel zoning fixes;
- recommend a West Downtown MRA; and
- identify small-scale neighborhood commercial or mixed-use opportunities beyond downtown Los Alamos and White Rock Town Center.

Feedback on Affordable Housing

Commissioner Grimm summarized comments submitted to the Commission by local resident Kevin Holsapple. Holsapple argued that the County’s high Area Median Income (AMI), influenced by LANL wages, makes housing unaffordable for many service and retail workers, even when eligibility is capped at 60% AMI. He recommended adopting a local wage-based affordability metric and requiring affordable-housing set-asides for residential developments receiving County subsidies or incentives.

Following up on Holsapple's comments, Grimm raised two questions for County Legal, Community Development, and CZB staff to consider in the Comprehensive Plan:

- Can the County use local wage-based criteria instead of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) AMI standards to determine affordable-housing eligibility, particularly for projects that combine County assistance with federal or state funding? County staff replied that research would be needed to answer this question.
- Could lowering the AMI threshold sufficiently improve affordability for lower-income local workers without creating a separate wage-based metric?

Elias Isaacson, Community Development Department Director, responded that the approach taken in the County’s adopted Affordable Housing Plan uses deed restrictions to preserve affordability at different income levels. As an example, he pointed to the Ninth and Iris Street Apartments, where the County is using deed restrictions to help ensure rents remain affordable to households earning 45% AMI or less. Similarly, at Coyote Mesa on DP Road, the County is using local and state funds to secure affordability restrictions on approximately 250 units, targeting an average of 80% AMI while allowing a range of 60%–100% AMI to reduce vacancies and maintain flexibility for the developer.

Grimm asked whether the Comprehensive Plan should include stronger language on

housing affordability based on County feedback.

Isaacson responded that an overarching goal of the plan update is to align it with existing adopted plans, such as the Affordable Housing Plan, and not to introduce new policies or programs. He added that, "our intention with this effort is to really just reference back to other adopted plans, whether it be our affordable housing plan, our downtown plans, our pedestrian plans, our transit plans, things like that, as we move forward."

Feedback on Measuring Progress on Land Stewardship

Grimm raised concerns about the Plan's proposed measures to signal progress on stewardship and leverage of parks, recreational spaces, and open spaces.

Grimm referenced the proposed measure that the aggregate value of private property adjacent to County open space is rising faster than the Countywide average. She asked whether there was evidence that properties adjacent to County-owned open space are undervalued relative to the quality and accessibility of that space. She said that, if there is not, then property value increases may not be an appropriate measure of open space improvements.

Grimm also referenced the proposed measure that per-capita spending on parks and recreation keeps pace with inflation each year. She was concerned that measuring spending per resident could unintentionally encourage fees for parks, trails, and recreational amenities that are currently free.

Grimm recommended usage-based measures, such as visitation and participation, rather than relying primarily on spending and property values to evaluate progress on open-space quality and accessibility. CZB consultant Thomas Eddington agreed to review and clarify the measures.

Next Steps

Lombardi said that the revised draft incorporating feedback would be distributed for Commission and public review in early November, followed by Commission discussion on November 18. The P&Z Commission expects to make its recommendation to Council about plan adoption at that meeting.

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

October Lunch with a Leader: Maggie Meier

Maggie Meier began her talk, "Understanding and Humanizing Homelessness," by saying that she knew little about the subject 1½ years ago when she joined the Interfaith Coalition on Homelessness, but she was asked to become their public educator. She has learned that the public often fails to identify homeless people as human beings due to the stigma attached to homelessness. To enable us to identify with the homeless and remove the stigma, she provides data that reveal the complexity of the problem.



Maggie Meier addressed the League on the topic of Homelessness. Courtesy Photo.

Mental illness, addiction, and laziness are all commonly attributed to the homeless. In fact, 25-60% of the homeless are employed. But at $7.25, the federal minimum wage, one must work 106 hours a week to pay for a 1-bedroom apartment. There is too little affordable housing. Without a home, meeting basic needs can be a full-time job, battling insomnia, malnutrition, and hyperthermia.

Eighty percent of homeless people report abuse in their past. Forty-nine percent of them have been victims of violent assault, 37% have suffered sexual assault. Early trauma is much more likely to result in homelessness. Fifty percent of the chronically homeless were homeless before the age of 25.

The trauma of homelessness can compound or trigger mental illness. Among the homeless, about 11% are bipolar, about 20% are schizophrenics, and about 45% suffer from depression. About 30% of the homeless suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Addiction can lead to the loss of employment, leading to homelessness, but the effort to stay warm on the street can also lead to addiction. About 37% of the homeless are addicted, twice the national rate, mostly to alcohol. Meier said there is no correlation between homelessness and drug use.

The panhandlers we see are not necessarily homeless. Most of the homeless stay hidden out of shame or fear. When we see them, we should treat them with dignity and courtesy; they are people with a trauma-filled story.

People do not become re-housed without help. It's easier and less expensive to keep them in their homes. McCurdy Ministries, a family resource campus in Española, works to prevent homelessness.

There are several approaches to helping the homeless. One is "Housing First," which provides a home with no preconditions.

In Española the Pathway Shelter, the only emergency shelter north of Santa Fe in New Mexico, provides essential support: warmth, shelter, shade, medical help, sleep, water, food, clothes, shower, safety.

The next level of support, stabilization, is designed to provide a path to recovery. It offers a permanent-ish address, ID, a secure place for one's possessions, mental health care, addiction treatment, poverty-help programs. Consuelo's Place in Santa Fe provides rooms that lock. Eagle Village in Española is transitional housing. The final step, reintegration with society, takes a lot of effort.

Meier concluded by saying that the ICOH rehabilitation effort is "up and running," but needs help writing grants for a busing system to get people to the rehab clinic.

Barbara Calef

Tickler Report – Upcoming Council Agenda Items

Tickler Report

Tentative Council Agenda Items, as of October 28, 2026

A partial list of tentative Council agenda items from the County tickler distributed on September 29. All items are subject to change.

- **Acceptance of Land Tracts C-2 and C-4 from the Department of Energy**
  - 11/10/26 meeting. Briefing. Action requested..
- **Amendments to Chapter 12, Article II, Business Registrations and Licenses**
  - 11/10/26 meeting. Introduction of Ordinance. No action requested. .
- **Amendments to Chapter 16, Development Code, Section 16-65 Sign Standards**
  - 11/10/26 meeting. Introduction of Ordinance. No action requested. .
- **Historic Master Plan**
  - 11/10/26 meeting. Briefing. No action requested.
- **LEDA Project Grant and Loan, and MRA Grant And Redevelopment Agreement, for The Guest House**
  - 11/10/26 meeting. Public Hearing. Action requested.
- **MRA Grant for The Rock Project in White Rock**
  - 11/17/26 meeting. Introduction of Ordinance. No action requested.
- **LEDA Project Loan and Grant, and Public Participation Agreement, for Renovation and Conversion of former CB Fox Building by 1735 Central Investment LLC**
  - 11/17/26 meeting. Continuation of Public Hearing held on 10/27/26. Action requested.
- **2027 Council Strategic Priorities**
  - 11/19/26 meeting. Discussion. No action requested.
- **Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) System**
  - 12/03/26 meeting. Follow-up discussion from 9/8/26 meeting. Possible action

eComment Tool for Council meetings:

You can submit public comments for selected upcoming meetings. See:

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

Select List View and This Year. Locate the meeting and look for -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/

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 newRsletter 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

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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