

League of Women Voters of Wellesley  
Board Meeting Minutes  
January 9, 2024 / 12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.  
Warren Building, Room 008

Attending: Niki Brinkman-Ofenloch, Laura Brown-Mackinnon, Marguerite Chatelier, Jenn Fallon, Irene Flint, Ann-Mara Lanza, Bonny Nothern, Marlene O'Brien, Margie Palladino, Ellie Perkins, Rama K. Ramaswamy

Absent: Deb Codispoti, Tanvi Venkata, Ivy Wang

The meeting was called to order at 12:33. The meeting was also available on Zoom to accommodate Jenn Fallon who was unable to attend in person.

**1. Welcome - Bonny Nothern**

Marguerite read a land acknowledgement she heard at the Old South Meeting House prior to the play "Phillis in Boston" about the enslaved poet Phillis Wheatley. This was called a Land and Labor Acknowledgement, recognizing not only the lives, but also the labor of those who built our country, Native Americans and enslaved people.

**2. Minutes of December 12, 2023**

Ann-Mara moved and Niki seconded her motion to approve the minutes of December 12, 2023. The motion passed unanimously.

**Moved:** to approve the minutes of December 12, 2023.

**3. Treasurer's Report**

- a. Because Deb was unable to attend, her report was read by Bonny. Our income this past month was \$587.76, expenses were \$1545.59 and our total assets are \$38,280.71.
- b. Three of our CDs will be rolling over prior to February 7, 2024, as agreed at our last meeting.
- c. There are no outstanding expenses, but one more corporate donation is expected soon.
- d. Please remember to submit expense forms for all bills, even for donated expenses.
- e. The current budget review should be finished by our February meeting. The goal of the review is to make the budget easier to use with clarified assignment of expenses. It will not necessarily change what we spend the money on, but rather pull items together that were dispersed in previous budgets so that we can readily see the cost of an event. Irene pointed out that we usually need the budget completed prior to our March meeting.
- f. Marguerite would like to ask for additional program funds while the budget is under revision.
  - She feels that we missed out on opportunities this year, for example, to fund a LWVW table for the Martin Luther King (MLK) Breakfast, to participate at a book event, to attend a conference.
  - Should we put more money aside for speakers, as more potential speakers are asking to be paid? Marlene pointed out that the League may actually be a place where academics are pleased to speak, if we clearly explain our values and our audience.

- Marlene suggested that it is also possible to apply to the State League for funding. A clarified budget will facilitate that request.

#### **4. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - Rama K. Ramaswamy**

Rama explained that the MLK Breakfast is a chance to get people from all the different silos in town together to discuss what MLK'S legacy means, including his lesser known work like anti-militarism. She asked us last month to think about what MLK's legacy means to us, personally. Following our discussion, Bonny will pull together our thoughts to be read at the breakfast and also to post on our web site.

- Ann-Mara is proud that we have arranged to have early voting at Barton Road this year as this will expand access to voting, one of MLK's goals.
- Laura remembers his oratory skills, his genius, his presence, all shining a light on so many things that people had been trying to ignore. And we are part of this legacy focusing on how important voting is.
- Marlene said it is important to consider whom we vote for, encouraging people of color to run for office. At each level we are responsible to carry out the goals of our local League and of State and National.
- Bonny saw the importance of the League in carrying out MLK's goals when her mother was driven to her citizenship ceremony and to her first chance to vote by a neighbor, a member of the League of Women Voters Wellesley (LWVW).
- Niki remembered the bravery and courage of the people who worked and even died to make voting accessible, as well as the northern backlash that occurred once the reality of integration set in. Even in the League years ago there was some competition between the rights of women and of people of color. She suggested we acknowledge that and apologize for having focused exclusively on white women.
- Marguerite reminded us of the book Erry Johnson gave us multiple copies of, *Formidable: American Women and the Fight for Equality 1920 - 2020* by Elisabeth (Betsy) Griffiths, which clarifies the roles of women of color in the struggle for equality.

#### **5. Legislation/News from LWVMA and LWVUS - Margie Palladino and Marlene O'Brien**

- a. Margie told us that a House vote would be held January 10 on a bill (H4115) that garnered the attention and support of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) in large part because of our April 2023 program highlighting domestic abuse and the importance of expanding the definition of domestic violence to include non-violent acts known as coercive control for the purposes of obtaining a restraining order. The House leadership included coercive control in a bill called An Act to Prevent Abuse and Exploitation, H4241. The legislation addresses teen sexting and image-based sexual assault, commonly referred to as "revenge porn." Another bill that was explained at our April 2023 program would regulate abusive litigation which costs a targeted person time, money, and emotional stress, and often affects children too. That bill has resulted in some change in the judiciary. We can be pleased that our event was truly instrumental. We need to call or email our legislators to be sure they are in support of H4241.

- b. On January 5th we received an action newsletter from the LWVMA which we should look at for issues we are interested in supporting. February 7, 2024, is the deadline to get bills out of committee, so we may be asked to make calls before then.
- c. On January 17, 2024, the Affordable Housing Specialists will offer a Zoom on bills concerning housing issues like eviction and the right to counsel. Those who don't have an attorney are at a considerable disadvantage in court. Renee Spencer of our Wellesley Housing Authority will speak on this Zoom and the following day she will testify at a public hearing on these bills. Renee has been asked to serve on the Governor's Advisory Council which demonstrates the Governor's commitment to public housing.
- d. On January 30, 2024, the legislative action group would like us to attend a Zoom at 7 p.m.: Advocacy 101 for Local Leagues, explaining how to take local, state and national action.
- e. Marlene wondered if there were any bills concerning legal aid which needs a substantial increase in funding and should be a priority of LWVMA.
- f. Marlene attended a Zoom about a significant change in the National League (LWVUS) financial structure concerning membership dues and also donations. The Per Member Payment (PMP) will be changed and "centralized" with the sharing of the \$112.50 individual or household membership among National, State and Local changing substantially: Lifetime Memberships will be left untouched; Student Memberships will be eliminated and subsidized by the local Leagues; of the Individual and Household Memberships, the LWVUS will get 33%, 47% will go to State and 20% to the local League. One will be able to join at any level and there will be the option for automatic renewal. Marlene believes this is very much about donations, not dues. Booz Allen consultants concluded some years ago that the younger generation is very willing to be supporters, less so to be joiners. Some years ago we changed from counting members to counting members and supporters because of this shift. Currently when you have donors to a Local or State League, information isn't required to be shared, but after the change, National will have full access to this data. Local and State Leagues are resisting this as they had cultivated their donors and grants would also go to National. About a quarter of the Local Leagues are becoming 501(c)3s and Marlene believes we should consider this because a 501(c)3 can attract more donors as it is tax-deductible. For some local businesses, it doesn't matter, but some others may find it more desirable. (It is only necessary to be a 501(c)4 if you are paying lobbyists for advocacy.) We decided to form a working group: Marlene and Margie will look into this and perhaps it will be a topic at 2025 Annual Meeting.

## **6. Membership - Niki Brinkman-Ofenloch**

- a. Our total membership is 131, with 98 Primary Members, 12 Household Members, 8 Lifetime Members, and 13 Student Members. Following our membership drive, some did choose not to renew, although some are still pending. Mainly we lost students, but that may be the nature of student members. We do have two new student members, now sophomores.
- b. Following up on Marlene's discussion, Niki has already been asked to provide a LWVW contact email for the new membership software conversion. It was decided to use the general [lwvwellesley2@gmail.com](mailto:lwvwellesley2@gmail.com) email address.
- c. Should we have a membership event?

## **7. Program - Marguerite Chatelier**

- a. Our student members are planning a program: Vote 16 on Saturday, January 27, from 10:30 to noon. They have a Citizens Petition for Annual Town Meeting for Vote16 and they will explain their enthusiastic support in this educational event. LWVW has no position on this, nor has National, but several chapters have already taken positive positions.
- b. We are hoping to have a Valentines' Day event.
- c. Meet the Candidates night will be February 15, 2024, at 6:30 p.m, in the Wakelin Room, Wellesley Free Library.
- d. Tuesday, March 5th, 2024, Presidential Primary and Town Election Day.
- e. There will be a coffee in March covering relevant issues coming before Town Meeting.
- f. April 25th Marguerite will host a wine and cheese Book Club to discuss Just Action: How to Challenge Segregation Enacted Under the Color of Law, by Richard and Leah Rothstein. The focus will be on Chapter 2 and Marlene will suggest some discussion questions.
- g. Annual Meeting will be May 15, 2024.

## **8. Voter Service - Jenn Fallon**

Papers are still being returned for town-wide offices and can be pulled until January 11, 2024, and need to be returned by 1/16/24. Papers for Town Meeting Members (TMM) can be pulled up until 1/26 and must be returned by 1/30/24. There are now six people running for two open Select Board positions. Due to the high number of candidates, we have extended Meet the Candidates Night, February 15th, to 2.5 hours, so it will now be 6:30-9 p.m. There will be no food served. Jenn and Diane Robitaille Hemend are handling the social media themselves. Erry Johnson will convene her usual group to plan questions. Once the program is finished, Laura will post it on the web site. At the moment, we are not sure how many races are uncontested, but if there is a concern about having enough time for the contested races, candidates in non-contested races may not be given the opportunity to speak live. Marlene mentioned that some towns record statements from the uncontested candidates prior to the event and make them available online.

## **9. Newsletters/Website - Laura Brown-Mackinnon**

- a. Laura arranged to receive reports from Board members on upcoming activities and programs which need to be included in the next newsletter.
- b. Marlene requested that we not only list our local positions on our website, but also link to State and National League positions.

## **10. Nominating Committee - Marguerite Chatelier**

Marguerite thanked all of us for responding to the calls and emails of the Nominating Committee. Our cooperation was appreciated.

## **11. Closing Comments - Bonny Nothern**

- a. Bonny reminded us LWVMA has encouraged us to develop a climate change position and this will be important for the June LWVUS Convention. We do have a position on land use and conservation (the latter from 1968). Perhaps we can draw from statements from other town groups. Marlene felt that it would make more sense to have a statement come down

from National as opposed to having Local Leagues put time into this and possibly come up with quite different statements about this national/global issue.

- b. Niki asked Board permission to run for School Committee. Laura moved and Margie seconded that Niki be allowed to run and remain on the Board in her current position. This was approved unanimously.

**MOVED:** to allow Niki Brinkman-Ofenloch to run for election to the School Committee and remain on the LWVW Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:31 p.m.

Our next Board Meeting will be held on February 13, 2024, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. in Room 008, Warren Building.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ellie Perkins, Secretary