

League of Women Voters of Wellesley
Board Meeting Minutes
September 12, 2023 / 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, Ellie Perkins, Rama K. Ramaswamy

Absent: Deb Codispoti (due to Covid), Margie Palladino, Tanvi Venkata, Ivy Wang

The Meeting was called to order at 12:32 p.m.

1. Welcome - Bonny Nothern

- a. Rama and Bonny recently spoke with a representative of a Native American organization about Land Acknowledgements. They had heard that they are being criticized for being performative, in some cases. In order to avoid this pitfall, Bonny carefully acknowledged the people who have lived on this land for thousands of years and stated that we are grateful and humbled by the sacrifices of these peoples. We are dedicated to promoting equity, inclusion, diversity and belonging (DEI).

2. Minutes of Planning Meeting, July 31, 2023

- a. We decided to include in future minutes the names of Board members who make and second motions, according to Roberts Rules.
- b. Ann-Mara moved to accept the minutes of the Planning Meeting on July 31, 2023, as amended. The motion was seconded by Rama.

VOTED: to accept the minutes of the Planning Meeting, July 31, 2023, as amended.

3. President - Bonny Nothern

- a. Bonny reviewed her intention to keep as closely as possible to our scheduled timing in discussing each of our agenda items in order to begin and end our meetings on time.
- b. We have agreed to make an effort not to talk over each other, interrupt and/or "dominate" the conversation during our meetings.

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

- a. Rama asked if any of us has had experiences over the summer that brought to mind our previous DEI conversations.
- b. Ann-Mara mentioned a Chamber of Commerce event held today where Lee Pelton, CEO of the Boston Foundation, spoke, followed by a panel discussion. During the panel Daryl Settles, a developer, was asked what we could/should do, considering the panel had said housing in Boston has basically become segregated. He had no answer and said "I don't know". He said people simply do not understand how their Black neighbors are feeling in the current national climate. The past five years have set us back 25 years. This was stunning for Ann-Mara to hear: in order to address these problems, we need to acknowledge our history, but people in our country are trying to erase this history.

- c. Niki has been viewing Ted Talk videos dealing with racial issues compiled by the Women's Giving Cooperative. When she sent some to her mother and aunt, both from a generation that tried "not to see race", valuable conversations ensued.
- d. Marguerite manages our neighborhood email listserv, and she heard from a father who asked her to send out an email saying that he had lost his dog. In only two hours, the dog was found on a rock in the middle of the river, due to the efforts of the police departments of two different towns. Marguerite was stunned at the tremendous amount of manpower to find a dog, when people of color in need are often put off and don't receive the attention a human life should deserve.
- e. Marlene told us that Lawrence Catholic Academy, where 94% of the students have backgrounds of color, has introduced a social skills class because there are such great cultural differences that people new to this country are coping with that it isn't enough to just experience living here to be adequately prepared. Rather students need targeted help in navigating the new culture. Students weren't doing well in high school application interviews because their cultures, for example, frowned on looking others in the eye during conversation or shaking hands. They didn't know when to sit down during an interview or to sit up straight in their chairs. It was necessary to raise awareness in the admissions officers so they wouldn't judge students for their "unusual" behavior and also to help the students understand that they can explain that their customs are different.
- f. Rama had an experience that reminded her that psychologists say we have a rational brain as well as the lizard brain that we tap into in crisis, the knee-jerk reaction: When her dog took off after a rabbit from Moses Pond, she asked herself "What am I going to do?" She was surprised to realize that these words were in English. Rama grew up speaking a number of languages and, in the past, that voice in her head has not spoken English. She realized that she has made a big change: she has codeswitched into the dominant culture!

5. Membership - Niki Brinkman-Ofenloch

- a. We have 151 members: 110 primary, 14 additional, 8 lifetime and 19 student members. Michelle Chalmers is our newest member.
- b. Membership emails have gone out once and a reminder will be sent this week, followed by paper letters to be mailed September 20th. So far, we have only received 11 renewals.
- c. The State League Leagueleaders list has been updated and we should all have been included in a welcome mailing sent by Brynne Gorman on September 11. Marguerite wondered if we should ask other members if they would be interested in receiving these mailings, which only go to Board members. Laura will ask the State League if this would be appropriate and, if so, will offer the option in our newsletter and we will collect names to be sent to the State.

6. Treasurer's Report

- a. Deb has covid and is absent today. She sent in a brief report.
- b. Our banking accounts have been moved from Bank of America to Needham Bank.

- c. Our assets in Needham Bank are \$26,900.79, including checking, savings and three CDs. We still have a Mutual One CD amounting to \$5564.30 which will be due in October. Our total assets are \$32,465.09.
- d. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) quarterly PMP has been paid and the national League of Women Voters quarterly PMP, as well as the MyLO registration (Vote411), will be paid later this month. We have a new credit card and paid the Constant Contact bill with that card.

7. Program - Marguerite Chatelier, Ann-Mara Lanza, Irene Flint

- a. Ann-Mara reported that our Opening Meeting topic is *Who is Protecting your Right to Read?*, with League of Women Voters of Wellesley (LWVW) member Mary Ann Cluggish. Mary Ann has varied experience, but most pertinent to this program is her time as a Library Trustee in Wellesley and her service on the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. In addition to addressing our topic, she will tell us about a law that has been proposed at the state level to protect our right to read. Another speaker will be Jamie Jurgenson, Director of the Wellesley Free Library. We are also hoping that someone from the Wellesley schools will join them to explain how the schools are handling these challenges.
 - People are so afraid of pushback that they are often not protecting this right. Ann Mara thinks we should think through ahead of time what we would do if something disruptive happened during this event, although this certainly may not happen.
 - Perhaps it would help to have all questions submitted on cards, instead of spoken. We would need to address all the questions received to make sure we were not screening inappropriately, but this might help us avoid having anyone make a speech, in asking their question. In other meetings, it has helped to define clearly that "a question is a brief sentence that ends in a question mark. We will only entertain questions, not comments."
 - We should present our "rules of the meeting." Bonny volunteered to handle the introduction and the presentation of our requirements for questions, as well as enforcement.
 - We will also need to have our own questions. And we should have runners to collect written questions that come up during the meeting.
 - Laura suggested that the Massachusetts ACLU has a toolkit on their web site that might be helpful.
 - A request will be sent out for people willing to bring cookies or snacks to this event.
- b. Marguerite and the committee have compiled a list of all the proposed program suggestions that they have received. Rather than making decisions about topics to be cut, it seemed best to retain the complete list and ask the Board to select favorite topics to be considered first. After discussion, the following topics were highlighted:
 - DPW: the EPA, the stormwater situation
 - Journalism and Democracy: how publishers are trying to sustain newspapers. One model is to not offer subscriptions to a publication, but to offer membership to an organization where the newspaper staff becomes the convener of educational and civic events.

- LWVMA Studies, especially the one on reparations
 - The Americans with Disabilities Act issues.
 - Professor Marion Just, Wellesley College: the Psychology of Voting.
 - Lowering the voting age. Rama knows a high school student who might be able to join us for a coffee on this topic.
 - How to raise a voter. This topic might attract adults with young children, a group we don't often draw to our events.
- c. If cost is an issue for a particular program, we should look into joining forces with other leagues or organizations.
 - d. The program committee proposes a social event on Sunday, the 10th of December, from 4 to 6 p.m. Traditionally the December Board meeting was followed by a holiday party and the membership was invited to attend. We agreed to plan this event following our December meeting.
 - e. The committee has prepared a calendar, a Google Doc called "Bare Bones", that will be printed and made available to all of us at every Board Meeting.
 - f. FYI: Senator Alice Peisch will speak on September 18, at 7 p.m. at the UU Church.
 - g. If anyone needs our help running a program or donations of food for an event, they should send an email to the board. This will also get such requests into the newsletter.

8. Voter Services - Jenn Fallon

- a. Jenn has set up an expense form for all of us to use in reporting expenses to Deb. For budgeting purposes, we also need to report expenses that we have decided to donate.
- b. Jenn has also drafted a flyer, with a QR code to link to our site, although we apparently could also use a National League flyer. She will consider both, as she will need one for the upcoming high school voter registration. We will also need one for the Volunteer Day.
- c. Jenn will probably need to arrange a prep session for the Special Town Meeting, November 6th and 7th, 2023. The issues on the Warrant that people may want to learn more about would probably be the Sisters of Charity article and the new HR position reporting to Megan Jop. Tentatively, they are looking at Wednesday, November 1, 2023.
- d. Jenn will need backup for the morning session of the National Voter Registration Day at the high school on September 19. Ellie and Bonny volunteered to cover from 8:30 to 11 a.m..
- e. Erry Johnson has enlisted Lucy Costa to manage How to Run for Public Office.
- f. Should we also have another voter registration session? We decided that The Nines would be a good location and it has a community room that we could use.
- g. For future reference, there is a new high school room at the Library that is getting good use.

9. Newsletter/Website - Laura Brown-Mackinnon

- a. Constant Contact is up and running. Laura, Bonny and Niki are the account managers.
- b. For the newsletter, Laura will include a reminder to renew membership, asking if anyone wants to receive the Leagueleaders email (if we have permission), Opening Meeting, Day on the Hill, Volunteer Day.

- c. Jenn has also created a form to request publicity for us to consider adopting. This may be helpful for Ivy and Tanvi, in particular.
- d. Bonny asked if anyone had information to give to Tanvi and Ivy whom she is meeting with Sunday evening. Marlene asked if it might make more sense to have students serve on an advisory board as opposed to trying to fill them in on Board meetings they are unable to attend. It would be great to have a LWVW group at school as there are 19 students and that may develop. Overall, Bonny believes the investment we make by being flexible with the students is very well-spent. (This is one of the points made in the book How to Raise a Voter.)

10. Legislative Envoy

- a. Margie was unable to be at our meeting because she is on Beacon Hill at a hearing on the Act to Improve Protections relative to Domestic Violence (H.1547/S.1077) and the Act Relative to Controlling and Abusive Litigation (H.1399/S.1079).
- b. On September 14th, Palma McLaughlin will speak on family and children's bills for Meet the Legislative Specialist on Zoom.
- c. This week Margie met Representative Michael Day and spoke with his chief of staff and deputy legal counsel about the gun safety bill. On September 13th, she will participate in the Gun Violence Prevention Lobby Day. The gun lobby is swamping the legislators with communications against the bill.
- d. We need to call or write to Alice Peisch and Cindy Creem to let them hear our opinions about all these bills.

11. Closing Comments - Bonny Nothern

- a. Bonny asked if anyone is interested in taking the State League's Moderator Training? Marlene agreed that this is quite valuable.
- b. Bonny brought up our previous discussion of qualities of leadership, what do we appreciate and what are we looking for in our leaders. People may not think of themselves as leaders, but they definitely have leadership skills or may want to cultivate them.
- c. Bonny found the job descriptions of Board positions from 2019 which she will send out to us to review.
- d. She also hopes we will consider having a strategic plan. This would be a reminder of our mission, challenges, strengths, threats, and goals. It might underscore the value of working as a team.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:26 p.m.

Reminder: Our next Board Meeting will be held on October 10, 2023, in the Warren Building, Room TBD.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellie Perkins, Secretary