

League of Women Voters of Wellesley
Planning Meeting Minutes
July 31, 2023 / 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.
25 Sheridan Road

Attending: Niki Brinkman-Ofenloch, Marguerite Chatelier, Deb Codispoti, Jenn Fallon, Irene Flint, Bonny Nothern, Margie Palladino, Rama K. Ramaswamy

Attending via Zoom: Ann-Mara Lanza, Ellie Perkins

Absent: Laura Brown-MacKinnon, Marlene O'Brien, Tanvi Venkata, Ivy Wang

The meeting was called to order at 9:46 a.m.(due to technical delays with the zoom)?

1. Welcome - Bonny Nothern

- a. Bonny told us that her main focus this year will be inclusiveness. For this reason, she will always make a hybrid option available for our board meetings. She is confident that our technical prowess will improve throughout the year.
- b. This year Bonny plans to discuss strategic planning in terms of our mission (determined by the State and National Leagues) and our goals (which can be more local). How will we follow our mission to achieve our goals? We will need to look at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Sadly, the State League was actually forced to deal with threats during the past year, direct challenges to democracy.
- c. On a personal level, Bonny asked us to look at our discussion format to be sure that it is easy for all of us to feel we have a chance to speak. We should make an effort to listen carefully and not interrupt each other during meetings. Because of the hybrid structure with Zoom, this will make things smoother as we will all have to wait our turn to talk. As Campfire Girls pass a Talking Stick around to acknowledge who has the floor, we could raise our hands. Bonny will remind us to respect this plan.
- d. Bonny also discussed responsibility for leadership. If Bonny is away, Marguerite will be a point person and Jenn will back her up, with everyone else's help.

2. Minutes from June 13, 2023

The minutes of June 13, 2023, were amended to include Tanvi Venkata's absence. A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

VOTED: To approve the minutes of June 13, 2023, as amended.

3. Treasurer's Report - Deb Codispoti

- a. We have approximately \$3,000 in checking and approximately \$12,300 in savings. One of our two CDs has been cashed out and the funds will be reinvested shortly. In November when the second CD matures we'll need to decide where to put those funds.
- b. Our bank accounts are still at Bank of America (BOA). We had decided to move our funds to Fidelity, but Deb has talked with Needham Bank and recommends that we move everything there. They have no fees, no minimums, their interest is higher than Fidelity's and she can get a free credit card and checks as well as on-line bill pay. We can open a money market account there that would be better than a BOA savings account.
- c. We discussed whether these banks had donated money to our postcard effort in the past, but only Needham Bank was asked for a donation and they refused. It doesn't

appear that where our accounts are held would figure into such a decision in the future. Jarvis and Roche Brothers readily offered funding this past year, but we lost Babson College, a previous donor. This October, we plan to ask Wellesley College, BOA, Jarvis, Roche Brothers, and perhaps Needham Bank.

- d. We also discussed whether Deb will need to ask us for permission to make every change. Margie and Marguerite are reviewing our By-Laws and will address this issue. We decided to move that discussion to our next meeting.
- e. Deb asked the Board's permission to make the proposed changes. It was moved and seconded to transfer our funds to a Needham Bank checking and savings account with a credit card, rather than to Fidelity. The motion was approved unanimously.

MOVED: To transfer our funds from Bank of America to Needham Bank, with checking and savings accounts as well as a credit card, rather than to Fidelity Investments.

4. Legislative Envoy - Margie Palladino

- a. Following discussion, we agreed that one goal this year will be to give our League of Women Voters of Wellesley (LWVW) members the opportunity to participate in the State League's advocacy efforts. Margie explained that the State focuses their advocacy efforts in the following subject areas:
Affordable Housing; Children and Family Issues; Criminal Legal System; Education Policy K-12; Elder Affairs; Elections and Voting; Environment - Climate; Environment - Natural Resources; Good Governance; Gun Violence Protection; Health Care; Immigration; Meeting Basic Human Needs; Racial Justice; Transportation; Women's Issues.
- b. To reach our goal of increasing advocacy of our Wellesley League members, we need to know which members are interested in each of these areas. As an exercise, posters were available at the meeting listing the State League's legislative priorities and those attending the meeting in person indicated which ones they considered the most important.
- c. Margie explained how members could help in the State's advocacy efforts. When the State determines that specific advocacy action is needed, the State contacts the legislative envoys and makes an "advocacy ask", such as attending a lobbying event at the State House or contacting legislators to ask them to support a bill. Often little prior notice of the advocacy ask is given by the State and, understandably, the more response to the advocacy ask, the better. If we know which members are interested in each of the League's advocacy subject priorities, Margie could reach out to them and ask them to take action also.
- d. To identify members interested in each of the areas, we decided to include a drop-down menu of the State's legislative priorities (listed above) in both the new and renewal membership forms. This would provide us with a list of members to contact when the State asks for a specific action.
- e. Ann-Mara added that Wellesley's Select Board this past week had decided to support a bill that competed with a bill that the League supported. Is there a way for us to connect with the Select Board to let them know our positions? Should we be talking to Alice

Peisch more, because she supported the competing bill that the Board endorsed. We should also keep town boards and committees informed of our positions.

- f. Bonny noted that it would be helpful to know when members are going away or will be unavailable and to set up a procedure to cover for them when an issue arises. Both Cindy Creem and Alice Peisch are in leadership positions at the State House and we need to have strong lines of communication with them and to be responsive. Maybe we need a "group " rather than one person to turn to in case someone is away. Perhaps we need a place for members to post when they will be away (a Slack channel or a Google Doc or a shared calendar.) We will discuss this at our September meeting.
- g. Bonny mentioned that the Brookline league asked to talk with her because they were so impressed with our website, our newsletter and our responses to legislative envoy emails. They want to do more of what we do and would like to join us in some of our activities. The State League actually keeps track of our activities.
- h. If anyone has an interest in a bill and has questions about what it will cover, we can go to the State's legislative specialist to see if the bill will cover a specific issue. If there is a loophole in the bill, they can help close it.

5. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion - Rama K. Ramaswamy

- a. Both the State and National Leagues have mandated that we use the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) perspective in everything we are doing. How can we model putting the DEI lens into our activities? We have decided that we are in favor of increasing our membership, being more inclusive and increasing our diversity. What are our priorities, therefore, and what is our vision of how we will do this? Should we have a list of questions to keep in mind as we plan programs? Every area would need to be customized, but Rama will prepare a basic list for us.
- b. We will be building a strategic plan, basing it on the Massachusetts League strategic plan. If we can think this through and make our thoughts succinct, it will save us time in the future and ease our path forward.
- c. Margie mentioned that when she programmed a panel for the domestic abuse bills, she went out of the group she is involved with to find a person of color to include on the panel and found her perspective extremely valuable. This has blossomed into more connections with diverse groups.

6. Membership - Niki Brinkman-Ofenloch

- a. We now have 150 members, with 109 primary, 14 additional, 8 lifetime and 19 student members. We have two new members: Miyabi Kadowaki, a student at Wellesley College, and Debra Stein who is rejoining the League.
- b. The new membership directory was mailed in June.
- c. The new membership renewal request will go out via email in September and it is very easy to renew online. Because our annual year begins in July and membership happens in the fall, it may seem out of sync.
- d. The League has no minimum age requirement, although voting members must be 16 or older. Men, of course, are welcome. In the past when the question of changing our name to eliminate "women " came up for reasons of inclusion, there was hesitation

because of the desire to keep the focus on women's rights. Irene noted that we also didn't want to change the name because of the name recognition that the League had established. Margie mentioned that other than our organization, there are not many groups in Massachusetts focused on advocating for policy issues important to women. In addition, our members are women who are active, interested, and eager to take action, so it makes sense that "women" is in our name.

- e. Historically, the League was not on the right side of history as it supported legislation limiting voting rights for people of color in the South, because they wanted to gain the support of the South for women's suffrage.
- f. Niki will email the registration form the week after Labor Day and again a week later. Paper letters will go out on the 20th.
- g. Niki asked what information we need to gather on the form. Are there items that we could eliminate? We need to look at the data and decide what we think about it. Bonny cautioned us that she found the data we have collected very helpful for her nominating committee work. Perhaps we don't need to ask if people want to host meetings? Should we reinstate an Observer Corps? We need to add DEI. If we highlight fundraising, Deb asked us to keep in mind what we plan to do with any money we raise.
- h. During the process of seeking new Board members this year, Bonny realized that it is very hard to ask someone to do a big job for the League if they haven't been involved on the Board before. It was also difficult to ask others to commit to a position without knowing who else would be on the team. We need to build a pipeline. We decided to add language to the form suggesting small jobs to be filled, like bringing cookies, to assure people that they can begin to contribute in a small way.
- i. We need to be sure we are encouraging those who have difficulty paying our membership fee to join with our help. Student memberships are free and don't require that we pay the National League a Per Member Payment, although we do pay it for those we cover with "scholarship memberships". Should we be letting people know that of the \$60 membership, \$30(?) goes to National and \$20(?) goes to State in Per Member Payments?
- j. Irene said the National League is thinking in the next few years of taking over membership and collecting the total membership payments. They would then send one third to state leagues and one third to local leagues. We should keep this in mind as we budget in the future.
- k. Ann-Mara, Niki, and Cara Rothman, Assistant Director of the Library, are working on our free Volunteer Fair on Sunday, October 1st, 2-4 p.m., and Monday, the 2nd, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. They will invite all volunteer organizations in town. Interest letters will go out this week. We will want to staff a LWVW table and be ready to talk about what we do. Do we need to think about our "look"? Does the flag resonate with everyone? Vote411 uses purple, we may also.
- l. Are we doing anything on Vote 16? No, the State league has not done a study on this or non-citizen voting. We could plan coffees on these issues.

7. Programming - Marguerite Chatelier

- a. Programming has a list of possible events and they meet regularly, eliminating some ideas. They will bring the strongest proposals to the board.
- b. Opening meeting will be on Wednesday, September 27th, from 7-9 p.m., in the Wakelin Room at the Library. It will be cosponsored with the Library. The topic isn't fully determined but it will involve book banning from the angle of protecting intellectual freedom. Mary Ann Cluggish will be our main speaker and the Library Director, Jamie Jurgenson, will be available to answer questions. We have also invited Toni Carlson, the coordinator of the Wellesley Public School libraries, hoping that she will answer questions about the schools. Jenn suggested that another possible speaker might be Ehrin Johnson, Head of Literacy at the Middle School. Libraries need to have a strong, public set of criteria for how they select books and this needs to be made public. October 1-7 is the American Library Association's Banned Book Week. In late September Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners is running a program, "Free People Read Freely", with read-ins.. There is some legislation pending that would cover both public and school libraries and there might be an action that could come out of this. We'll need to do a lot of publicity about this because this is the meeting that is open to the public. Co-sponsoring with the library is helpful, given their excellent publicity.
- c. The team is working on other ideas for programming as well. They are always looking for people to bring in for coffees or desserts and other events. They would like to do something about affordable housing, perhaps in January. Perhaps a coffee about voting at age 16 or municipal elections. There may be legislation about the book-banning situation and a coffee about that may emerge. Maybe a tour of Hunnewell School? Gun legislation? The Cliff Road project? It might be helpful to have a legislative specialist from the League come to help us figure out how to get involved in these processes, how to advocate and when to advocate. We could let people know through the membership form and Opening Meeting that we want to get people more involved with advocacy this year. Marguerite has just read a book called Just Action that offers helpful suggestions.
- d. Our Board meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of each month from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. If anyone in the future needs a night meeting, we will try to accommodate them. We will try to adhere to established start and end times.

8. Voter Service - Jenn Fallon

- a. Jenn feels it is important to increase the rate of voting, in addition to doing voter registration. Wellesley has strong voting, but not for all elections. She would like to know where we would suggest going to do voter registration. Sending reminders to get out the vote could be sent by the PTOs.
- b. Marguerite gathers neighbors at her house or others' houses to discuss upcoming elections. She also is concerned that so many Asians in town are not engaged in political discussions. We need to get out information in different languages in order to include underrepresented groups in voting. Should we do a program about how to become a citizen? How can we find the citizens/non-voters? Does 411 have translation services? There is also a Translation Club at the High School. Ann-Mara suggested investigating The Nines, where a diverse and international group lives in 350 apartments. Marguerite said we might be able to attract them by asking what their

problems/issues are, emphasizing the connection between politics, voting and their own needs. Rama suggested that the communications team put together a list of places to target for every event, what we need, where to post, etc.

- c. Jenn spoke with KC and found that the local, state and national primaries won't necessarily be on the same day, as it has not yet been decided.
- d. Jenn reviewed the many other Voter Service events that take place throughout the year.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:41p.m.

Reminder: our next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, from 12:30-2:30 p.m. in the Warren Building, Room 110.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellie Perkins, Secretary