



# UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

**League of Women Voters of Los Alamos**

**P. O. Box 158, Los Alamos, NM 87544**

**Website: [www.lwvlosalamos.org](http://www.lwvlosalamos.org)**

Volume 67, Number 6  
January 2015

President: Barbara Calef *bfcalf(AT)yahoo(DOT)com*  
Newsletter Editor: Kathy Taylor *kathytaylor1000(AT)msn(DOT)com*

## Calendar

- February 3     **Election Day**
- February 5     Bag It, Reel Deal Theater, 7 p.m.
- February 9     Legislative Reception, Garrett's Desert Inn, 5:30 p.m.
- February 10    League Day at the Legislature, NM State Land Office, 10:30 a.m.
- February 17    Lunch with a Leader, Paul Andrus, Mesa Library, 11:45 a.m.
- February 26    Board meeting, Mesa Public Library, noon
- March 2        Fund Drive Party, 926 Circle Dr., 7 p.m.

## ***Lunch with a Leader February 17: Paul Andrus***

In February, Lunch with a Leader will welcome Paul Andrus, the Housing and Special Projects Manager in the Community and Economic Development Department. He will talk about plans for building new housing and for rehabilitating the old. The event will be held, as always, at Mesa Library on February 17 at 11:45.

Looking forward to March 17, County Councilor David Izraelevitz will speak about recent activities in the County as well as a proposal he wants to share with us for giving back to the community.

*Karyl Ann Armbruster*

## **President's Message**

At the January 17 meeting of the LWVNM Board the members voted unanimously to adopt a Living Wage position through concurrence. The sustainability position of the Los Alamos League describes a sustainable society as one where, "Each individual would live in dignity with a livable wage." The new state position defines the living wage and explicitly states League support for a minimum wage law tied to the cost of living. League lobbyists will now be able to speak in support of the minimum wage bills during the current legislative session.

The board also updated the positions on the judiciary and children and families. To read the current positions, go to <http://www.lwvnm.org/positions.html>. The board discussed adopting the LWV Greater Las Cruces (GLC) position on education, but decided to postpone that action until an ad hoc committee has had time to consider merging the GLC and current LWVNM positions.

Our League will hold a **Program Planning** event the week of February 17 to review these and other state League positions. We will also discuss what we in Los Alamos have accomplished during the past year and what efforts we should undertake during the next year or two. Watch your e-mail for the exact date and location, or volunteer to be the host.

On March 2 we will meet at 7 p.m. at Amy Birnbaum's home at 926 Circle Dr. for a **Fund Drive Party**, to stuff envelopes with a copy of a letter asking non-member residents of the community to make donations to our organization. This is an opportunity to catch up on local news and get to know our fellow League members.

*Barbara Calef*

## **Bag It**

Plan to join your friends and neighbors at 7 p.m. on Thursday, February 5 to see the film **Bag It** at the Reel Deal and sign the petition asking the County Council to adopt an ordinance to ban single-use disposable plastic bags. The ad for the movie, paid in part by the League of Women Voters, has been running at the theater since the beginning of the month.

## **Two League Events in Santa Fe in February**

### **Legislative Reception, February 9, 5:30-7:30 p.m. and**

### **League Day, February 10**

The Legislature is in session again and the LWVNM Action Committee is looking at the proposed legislation, deciding what to support and what to oppose on the basis of our positions. All League members are invited to the LWVNM Legislative Reception on February 9 to chat with the legislators and hear Mimi Stewart and others discuss education funding and priorities.

The following day is League Day. This is an opportunity for members to familiarize themselves with our state government, attend committee meetings, and lobby the legislators. From 10:30 to noon we will hear talks by Fred Nathan about Think New Mexico's hospital pricing transparency initiative and by Dr. Gabriel Sanchez about voter disenfranchisement.

## ***Education Study Complete!***

This month League members met to discuss the consensus questions. Using notes from that meeting, the study committee drew up a new education position for our League. The LWVLA board met on Jan. 22 and adopted the following position. Our thanks to Susan O’Leary and the rest of the Education Study Committee!

### **LWVLA Education Position (Adopted 2015)**

The League of Women Voters of Los Alamos believes that a strong, collaborative relationship between K-12 education leaders and citizens must exist in order for the school district to successfully deliver education services meeting community standards. This belief is consistent with the League of Women Voters expectations for the relationship between citizens and all government entities.

As an elected body, the School Board should actively solicit and weigh heavily community input when making strategic planning and funding decisions. In order for citizens to provide educated and meaningful feedback, they need to be involved in the strategic planning process and have access to information about the district’s direction, the issues it faces, and its financial situation.

The strategic plan describes how the School Board addresses the needs of the children, including but not limited to academic goals, class size, enrichment programs (i.e., art, music, and athletics), vocational training, special education, and counseling. The strategic plan also discusses the facilities plans, enrollment trends, current financial budget, 5-year financial forecast, community involvement plan, and public communication plan.

In order for the School Board to solicit and incorporate community input into their strategic planning and annual budgeting processes, communication mechanisms need to be created and maintained as an essential part of the board’s business activities. Examples of communication mechanisms that achieve this objective are: community surveys; a formal strategic planning

process that incorporates citizen input; an Open Forum-type online feedback service; Facebook and other social media; and smaller district meetings between school board members and constituents.

In order for the community to learn about and participate in strategic planning and funding decisions, the School Board needs to routinely provide relevant information to the public as a normal part of the board’s business activities. That information would include: issues, options and data provided in advance of decision making deadlines; reporting on decisions made; and access to key policy documents like budgets and the strategic plan. The LAPS website should be the board’s primary communication vehicle. To be effective, it needs to have the following characteristics: easily found, accessible 24x7, and possessing a robust search capability.

Examples of other communication mechanisms that can be utilized include: broadcasting board meetings on PAC 8; sending email newsletters to subscribers; using smart phone apps to share information with community members; and using local media to communicate open issues and final decisions. The information presented should be in a format that is understandable to the typical citizen, and be timely and relevant to the issues.

## **Report of January Lunch with a Leader: Angelica Gurule**

Angelica Gurule, Los Alamos County's Environmental Services Division Manager, has been working for the county for about six months. Her first statement at Lunch with a Leader was that she is offended when people refer to her workplace as "the Dump". Instead, they should refer to it as "the Eco-Station". It is in fact a state of the art facility for re-cycling, transferring trash en route to the landfills in Rio Rancho and Los Lunas, and managing the closed landfill, which now serves as the base for a solar array.

Gurule recently visited the Friedman Recycling Center in Albuquerque to which most of the county's recyclable material is sent. She learned that the facility is accepting even more categories of waste than when we last reported on it in the spring. They accept plastics 1-7 (see the number in the little triangle), including clamshells; they now also take pots and pans and small electronics if they have no glass parts.

Friedman cannot recycle plastic utensils, and plastic bags are the bane of the business because they plug up the machinery. Glass is also hard on the machines and should never be deposited in the blue bins. The recycling program pays for itself, but we can do much more. Less than 20% of our recyclable material is put in the blue bins! A discussion about what to do with plastic bags revealed that the Monitor will take back the ones they use to wrap their papers; Smith's has a collection bin; and the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) supports the Bag Ban project underway in Los Alamos.

In an effort to increase the amount of waste recycled, the ESB is considering adding routine collection of yard waste; grass clippings compose a significant portion of the trash. Collection of food waste is another issue under investigation. They are currently considering how to involve more businesses, perhaps by changing the rate structure.

Four times a year the County collects brush and bulk items placed on the streets and sidewalks by residents. This service is just for brush and furniture. No televisions, motor oil, or windows should be put in the piles because the trucks are not equipped to deal with such items. Already this month the crews have collected four tons of Christmas trees!

Gurule reported on several projects underway at the Eco Center. The 100-year flood in September 2013 washed out the south side of the landfill, damaging the adjacent wetlands. The department will hire a company to design and implement a project to remediate the damage to the landfill cap and the wetland. Part of the expense will be reimbursed by FEMA.

Excessive methane accumulation around the perimeter of the landfill required that the department temporarily install a methane extraction system. The machinery has resolved the issue, but League members were shocked that the methane is vented into the atmosphere and recommended that an effort be made to collect and utilize the gas.

Compost is now available for use by residents. However, it includes bio-solids, a product of the wastewater treatment plant, and therefore should only be used for non-food vegetation. The recycling program for glass is very popular, but is causing some difficulties. The crushing machine is undersized and frequently gets jammed. Currently the supply of crushed glass exceeds the demand.

Gurule explained her role as staff liaison to the Environmental Sustainability Board. She prepares the agenda, interviews applicants for the board, and does research for them, but they make most of the decisions. The goal of the Environmental Sustainability Plan is to make Los Alamos County a more sustainable community. It addresses water, waste, and transportation, but not energy, which is the purview of the Department of Public Utilities.

Gurule encouraged League members to attend the ESB meetings, held at 5:30 in the Municipal Building on the third Thursday of the month.

## **Report of December Lunch with a Leader: Anne Laurent**

Anne Laurent, Director of the Department of Community and Economic Development, was invited to speak at LWL about the on-going effort to update the County's Comprehensive Plan. Although Council adopted a Vision Statement and Policy Plan in 2005, and many other plans exist, some in draft form and others adopted, a unified Comprehensive Plan has not been completed since 1987. The most glaring omission is an updated Land Use Map, essential for planning new development consistent with actual property ownership and community preferences.

Laurent passed out a draft outline of the contents of the Comprehensive Plan. She expects it to be about 200 pages long when complete and hopes to have "something" approved by the end of 2015. The vision plan has already been updated using 2011 Council Strategic Goals and a 2014 update. Drafts of Chapter 5: Economic Development, and Chapter 6: Housing were included in the packet. The housing plan includes many details consistent with the League's Position on Land Use and Transportation: Residential Neighborhoods.

Laurent explained how difficult the process has been. She started by reviewing a stack of some 20 documents adopted at different times and many of which are still valid. So far there has been no public involvement. Instead, staff has been reviewing and updating some of the chapters. Laurent did not explain how the land use chapter and map would be developed, but suggested that the topic could be addressed at neighborhood meetings. She added that it would include the Open Space Plan that Craig Martin has presented to the Sierra Club and PEEC during the last couple of months.

Public outreach is essential if the plan is to be accepted by the community, Laurent was told. She agreed and said that the County would present the history to the public and hold public meetings by neighborhood or chapter (of the

plan). She commented that the County has no general design standards except for the downtown and said that "we need to decide what we want to be".

*Barbara Calef*

## **Observer Corps Report**

At the December 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the County Council, the Board of Public Utilities presented a new Electric Rate Schedule, which is needed to cover increased costs. The Council sent the Rate Schedule back to the BPU because the Power Cost Adjustment appeared to violate the County Charter. The PCA would have allowed the cost of power to be passed directly to the rate payers instead of the Utility having to pick a high number to be sure of covering their costs. The new rate schedule will be heard at the February 17<sup>th</sup> County Council meeting.

At the January 6, 2015 County Council meeting, the councilors welcomed the two newly elected members, Susan O'Leary and James Chrobocinski. The councilors' main action of the evening was to elect Kristin Henderson as new Council Chair and David Izraelevitz as new Vice Chair.

At the recent work session in White Rock on January 20<sup>th</sup>, Council heard from staff regarding the shortfall in Gross Receipts Taxes for fiscal year 2015 (the current fiscal year). The county GRT is highly dependent on LANL, since LANL contributes about 80 percent of the county GRT revenues, but the LANL expenditures are a moving target these days and difficult to predict. The shortfall for the county adds up to about \$3.5M for 2015 and another \$2M for 2016. The Council discussed the options suggested by staff for reining in County expenses and increasing revenue. Options include restoring the \$1.5 million in property taxes which were eliminated in 2011; reducing County expenditures by 1%; and reducing the CIP fund by \$3.5 million and delaying the CIP projects for one year. Some or all of the options need to be adopted, and staff wanted guidance on where Council stood regarding these options. The details will be hashed out during the annual budget hearings in April.

*Lynn Jones*



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LOS ALAMOS
MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mail to: LWV Los Alamos
P.O. Box 158
Los Alamos, NM 87544

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if you are willing to receive our local newsletter Update as an electronic file, saving us postage.

Check here if you wish to receive friendly reminders of upcoming events by e-mail.

Membership Categories

Single membership: \$45

Household membership (two+ people at the same address): \$65

Single Sustaining membership: \$75

Household Sustaining membership (two+ people at the same address): \$95

Note: Membership checks should be payable to LWV-Los Alamos

Additional ways to support the local League

Unrestricted contribution (not tax deductible): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

LWV Education Fund (tax deductible): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Checks for tax-deductible contributions must be payable to LWVLA Ed. Fund and not combined with any other payments.

Interests (check as many as apply)

- One-time activities (unit meetings, fund-drive mailings, etc.)
Affordable Housing
Election Reform
Fuller Lodge
Land Use
Local Government
Medically Indigent Fund
Public Transportation
Sustainability
Water Issues
Not sure (I just support LWV)

Other (please suggest) \_\_\_\_\_

*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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