

The State of the League FY 2022-23

DEI Annual Report from Joanie Jones

In all our work, we try to look at issues through the lens of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). With our letters to government entities, our committees, our *Channel Voter* articles, voter service and book club discussions, LWVSB has educated ourselves and advocated for our DEI principles. Available to all members are live or prerecorded webinars on many topics offered by LWV United States in the League Management section of their website.

We will continue to unlearn and learn what we need to in order to form a more just world. We are making democracy work by trying to end discrimination in all parts of society, including housing, criminal justice reform and climate justice.

Voter Education Report from Revae Moran

We held several Forums designed to prepare local voters for the Midterm Elections in November 2022. All these Forums were held via Zoom and were livestreamed on our League's Facebook page so that people could attend the meetings virtually. Recordings of the Forums were posted on YouTube channel.

First, we held a Forum that explained the impact of splitting local city governments (Goleta, Carpinteria, and Santa Barbara) into districts. The mayors of all three discussed how these changes affected their jurisdictions. The county superintendent of schools Susan Salcido, also attended and explained how the schools and local government were impacted. Chris Carson moderated the Forum.

We posted information on our website about the newly formed State Assembly district 37, and spread the word that Steve Bennett is no longer our State Assembly representative because the new District does not include Ventura. We held a Candidate Forum in the fall with both candidates running for the seat in the newly formed district 37: Gregg Hart and Mike Stoker. Gregg Hart won and is our representative in the Assembly.

We also held a Pros and Cons Forum prior to the election, moderated by Shane Stark. Dianne Black and Quinby Janes also participated. We ordered hundreds of Easy Voter Guides in English and Spanish and distributed them at many locations throughout southern SB County.

Prior to the Presidential Primary in March 2024 and the Election in November, we will hold Candidate Forums for those running for office. These Forums will be announced in our newsletter, the Channel Voter, and posted on our website: lwvsantabarbara.org, so please check our calendar regularly for these and other local events of interest.

Sustainable Communities Report from Sandy Grasso-Boyd

AUGUST: With the idea of revitalizing the Sustainable Communities Committee, (SusComm) I initiated a brainstorming discussion of how its members would like to proceed. I asked members to respond to a survey I created and to attend a Zoom discussion in September.

SEPTEMBER: Members decided on SusComm topics and their commitments. It was also agreed that the Housing Sub-Committee would have separate meetings to allow an hour for the rest of the SusComm topics on the first Friday of the month.

OCTOBER: I assumed chairmanship of SusComm and with the idea of introducing monthly speakers to update our members on sustainable and environmental activities within Santa Barbara City and County, I arranged its first meeting and invited **Hillary Allen**, the Environmental Specialist for the City of Santa Barbara Sustainability and Resilience Department. She gave an excellent slide presentation on Waste Management and her role to provide outreach education programs to local residents.

NOVEMBER: We discussed the new Climate Commitment Grant and Earth Day themes and our participation. I expanded our committee invite mailing list to 40 names.

DECEMBER: Guest Speaker: **Garrett Wong**, Manager of the Santa Barbara County Climate Program, presented the climate plans that were just released. Members were informed of public workshops to be scheduled and asked to attend. The number of those attending our meetings range from 14 to 20.

JANUARY: Guest Speaker: **Alelia (Ahleyla) Parenteau** (Parentow) who directs the City's Sustainability and Resilience Department, reviewed the City's clean energy program to reduce carbon emissions and explained a new partnership with Electric Power to provide a complete Solar power and Smart Battery System at no cost to residents of Santa Barbara County. Meetings now began at 10:30am.

FEBRUARY: Guest Speaker: **Diz Swift** is the co-Chair of the Climate Interest Group for LWVUS and Director of Natural Resources for LWVC. She introduced the National League's Climate Interest Group and its offer of a "caucus-in-a-box" to help our League members discuss and take action on key climate issues in our community and state. We also conducted a mid-year review of the committee topics.

MARCH: Guest Speaker: **Brian Trautwein**, Senior Analyst and Director of the Watershed Program at the Environmental Defense Center (EDC). Brian's focus is on streams, rivers, watersheds, and sensitive habitats. This topic overlaps with Housing in its issues involving housing impacts on neighboring creeks and waterways.

APRIL: Facilitated by Gail Osherenko with guest speakers: **Douglas Kern**, director of the Gaviota Coast Conservancy, speaking in opposition to the Plains request to install safety valves on the damaged and corroded pipelines and **Ted Morton**, director of Santa Barbara Channel Keeper on their efforts to limit cruise ships entering SB harbor.

APRIL 29-30: Earth Day--League Booth and Climate Summit Participation

MAY: Guest Speaker: **Jennifer Hernandez** directs the Community Environmental Council's Climate Justice Program which has a goal of reaching vulnerable populations that are disproportionately impacted by climate change. The program especially reaches out to non-English speakers, bringing programs in Spanish to them.

JUNE: Guest Speaker: **Shane Stark**, board member and attorney, with Laura Haston facilitating. Shane discussed **The Agricultural/Urban Interface and Local Agency Formation Commission, and the status of appeals on the Los Flores Pipeline. Recommendations included a call for volunteers for the LAFCo subcommittee and a letter from our League opposing oil projects in the Santa Barbara Channel.**

During the year members reported on such topics as State Street workshops, plastic reduction, Goleta city ordinances, protecting creeks and watersheds, water Issues, wildfire plans and the the appeal of the Plains Pipeline Upgrade Project.

Housing Committee Report from Linda Honikman

In our second year as a separate Housing Committee we were able to expand education and advocacy efforts related to our priorities of increasing the low and moderate housing supply for local residents and workers and increasing housing security for all, especially renters. It was an impactful year and luckily we had a number of committee members step up to enable our League to be a leader and ally on these important issues.

We knew that reviewing hundreds of pages of 8-year Housing Element plans for South County jurisdictions would not be easy, but we did not anticipate the additional hurdles that would emerge--including

- A statewide shortage of planning professionals that contributed to a delay of Housing Element work
- Even higher rents due to factors such as 'work from home', a shortage of student housing and investors with no community connection
- Developers taking advantage of state laws which incentivize 50% more market rate units for a very modest affordability requirement and less local control
- An increase in illegal short term rentals and a trend of developers switching from housing to hotels
- More investors buying properties and evicting tenants for renovations as a way to increase rents beyond the state's 10% cap.

To educate ourselves we researched and/or had speakers provide information about:

- Housing Element Updates for Cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta and the County of Santa Barbara.
- Sustainable topics with Audubon, EDC and Sierra Club representatives
- Rent stabilization and tenant protections
- Short term rentals in the City of Santa Barbara
- State housing laws and potential impact locally
- City's Housing Authority projects and funding needs
- Sources of funding for affordable housing
- Heritage Ridge Project in Goleta and Bailard in Carpinteria
- Hotels vs housing problem
- Efforts to provide employee housing on publicly owned land by Schools and County

Besides our monthly meetings, community education opportunities included Housing Day, review of maps and LWVSB's activities at Direct Relief, a joint meeting with SBCAN and Monique Limon, the Democratic Women event on housing and homelessness and our informative March Housing Forum, "South Coast Housing 2030: Saying 'Yes!' Today" which can be viewed on our Youtube Channel.

To respond to issues related to our positions we made many comments and wrote letters to local governments. This summer we will be posting many of these on our website.

It does take a village and as the previous Housing Chair who thought the Housing Element work would end last February, I was especially grateful to Dianne Black and Lisa Carlos, who did much of the work on issues important to the County and City of Santa Barbara while Cheryl Rodgers continued to cover the City of Goleta.

Throughout the year we also continued working with other organizations to make our efforts more successful. Because we were able to respond to so many opportunities to offer comments, the reputation of LWVSB for being fact based and community focused was acknowledged by elected leaders and the media.

With the continuation of this year's team and some much needed energy and skills provided by our new Housing Chair, Meagan Turley, we should be able to sustain and even build on that going forward.

Social Policy and Program Report from Pam Flynt Tambo

The Social Policy Committee had few meetings this year, but some members became interested in committees that have branched off from Social Policy. Criminal Justice Reform continues to work with CLUE-SB and meets weekly. Gail Osherenko has been chairing those efforts this year. The Social Policy committee focus includes homelessness as well as low and very low affordable housing. The Housing Committee broke off into a separate committee more than a year ago and continues to concentrate on housing needs. Homelessness remains a focus in our county and is often coupled with Behavioral Wellness needs. We have also held some discussions regarding DEI with Joanie Jones in our committee meetings.

We held a live in-person forum last November at Direct Relief's community room. Each League committee was invited to use a table to meet with others informally about their committee. It may have been the only time that the Housing Committee had enough room to spread out city and county maps for people to see where some of our south county housing issues are located. We included a tour of Direct Relief's warehouse and operation with lots of information on the work that they do world-wide. It was informal and the first time we've held an in-person event since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020.

Two other forums were held in the spring. Our housing forum, the third one organized by Linda Honikman, was mentioned in Linda's report.

And our last forum this May was organized by Gail Osherenko. It was held the week of the 8th anniversary of the Refugio Oil Spill. Gail showed the film, *Broke*, that she produced about the spill and it was followed by a panel discussion.

In February we held meetings to collect our responses to the LWVC Program Planning document for the next 2 years. We requested that the state focus on Criminal Justice Reform, Housing, and Climate Change.

Looking ahead, a Social Policy Zoom meeting is planned for Thursday, June 29th, with Nancy Greep, a retired physician involved in healthcare reform, speaking on privatizing Medicare. And later in July we will hold a Program Planning meeting—to discuss and begin organizing our forums for fall 2023 and spring 2024. Decisions include topics, format, venue and organizers. The date and location of that planning meeting will be announced.

Criminal Justice Reform Task Force Report From Gail Osherenko

On May 16, 2023 the Board of Supervisors made the courageous, progressive and unprecedented decision to close most of the South County jail, remodel its intake center and retain only 128 beds for short time use between arrest and arraignment. Rather than trying to remodel the old jail, the CEO's office presented the Board with 3 options for adding either 1, 1.5, or 2 pods to the new Santa Maria jail. We urged them to choose option 1, only adding one pod (256 beds). This would reduce the capacity of both jails to a total of 728 certified beds, a number that is slightly below the current number of jail residents.

We applaud this decision and will be working with the county to be sure that funds are in place to provide mental health and addiction treatment in the community as well as more mental health beds and services. This is critical to end the practice of using jail space to house the homeless and mentally ill. Spending time in jail, esp. in a jail that does not provide meaningful treatment leads to frequent faces cycling in and out of expensive facilities that should only be holding those who present a danger to themselves or the community.

A subgroup of the League's Social Policy Committee formed the Criminal Justice Reform Task Force several years ago to study and respond to the urgent need to either remodel or substantially reduce the South County (Main) jail. The County is under federal court order in the *Murray v. County of Santa Barbara* case to meet detailed requirements for the provision of medical and mental health care, the treatment of people with disabilities, environmental health and safety conditions, and the use of restrictive housing (also known as solitary confinement). While the jails are under the control of our elected Sheriff, the Board of Supervisors has the authority to set the budgets of the public safety agencies including the Sheriff.

The League also has a popular book club. Organized by Elaine Rudin

Its purpose is to help our members keep current on League issues and engage in thoughtful discussions on important topics. They are on Zoom.

And finally, here is a Quick Summary of the League of Women Voters of California May Convention From delegate Pam Flynt Tambo

The Convention participants voted to retain current positions. The adopted issues for Education and Advocacy were:

- Making Democracy Work in California
- Climate Changes and Sustainability, including a focus on Water Resources
- Housing and Homelessness
- Criminal Justice/Juvenile Justice Reform

(These Issues for Education and Advocacy are very similar to the Program Planning issues our League forwarded to LWVC last February.)

Elections were held and Chris Carson, former LWVUS President and our League coach, is the new LWVC President. We look forward to continuing to work with Chris and the State League.

There were a number of workshops and caucuses and it was not possible to attend them all. One of these featured our own new LWVSB member and Political Science lecturer at UCSB, Lorelei Moosbrugger. She focuses her research on the quality of governance and spoke on Ranked Choice Voting, which has been adopted in several communities in California.

Delegate Ann Bailey also wrote about the convention for the June 1 Channel Voter, which is now on our website.

For more information about our committees and when they meet, go to our website calendar. The committee chairs are always happy to see more active League members.