



League of Women Voters of Albany County

March 2010

Educate

Participate

Advocate



March 15 and 18 Consensus Meeting: Local Government Consolidation/Shared Services

Monday, March 15, 5:30 pm

Souper Supper at Bethlehem Public Library, Borthwick Ave., Delmar, corner of Delaware Ave.

5:30 Bring a soup, salad, or dessert to share - also bring your place setting
No time to bring food? Come anyway. A small donation will be welcome.

Questions? Call Lois Griffin, 765-4733

6:30-8:30 Consensus meeting

Thursday, March 18, 9:30-11:30 am

Albany Main Public Library, 161 Washington Ave., Albany

SAME PROGRAM AT BOTH MEETINGS

Read the enclosed material on page 5 and choose the meeting most convenient for you.

Remember St. Patrick, think green!

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The League of Women Voters Albany County Invites you to a **Meet and Greet Coffee**

On Saturday, March 20, 9:30 -11:30 am at the home of Carol Webster.

Address is 24 Fox Hollow Greene, Delmar, NY.

Phone number is 439-1491. RSVP by March 17.



Come learn more about the League.

League of Women Voters of Albany County

Website: www.lwvalbany.org Email: lwvac@lwvalbany.org

Ann Brandon, President

Carol Webster (439-1491) and Martha Kissinger (439-6833), Membership Co-Chairs

Laura Ladd Bierman, Newsletter Editor



From the President

By popular demand, souper suppers are back! For our March 15th meeting, we'll be at the Bethlehem library for a delicious supper brought by members (see cover page). Don't forget your soup bowl! If you can't get to this meeting, come to the Thursday morning meeting at the Albany Public Library. We want your input for this important consensus on our recently adopted state study. Loretta Simon and Judy Thomson and their committee have been working hard to get ready for these meetings, and look forward to sharing their study with you. And please read the articles in this newsletter and last month's newsletter. If you no longer have it you can access it online at lwvalbany.org.

The breakfast with our legislators was a great success, thanks to Lois Griffin, Marian Schwager, Barbara Bartoletti, and all of you who came and brought guests. We have several new members and hopefully more will be joining. The legislators all seemed to enjoy the meeting and made it an informative and enjoyable morning for all.

On February 9th I attended the redistricting reform forum co-sponsored by the state league and the Rockefeller Institute of Government. This was another enlightening and informative program, pointing out the work that needs to be done in providing a fair process for all, and the convoluted rules to achieve this. One of the speakers said that New York had a very low census count ten years ago; we all need to work to make sure everyone is counted this time. The districts for state and federal legislators, plus federal and state funds to local governments all depend on these numbers. The forum was dedicated to the memory of Ruth Shur, a longtime League leader. Here is a wonderful quote from Ruth:

"There are three classes of people. Those who make things happen; those who watch things happen; and the overwhelming majority who have no idea what is happening. Save a friend from the majority...bring her (or him) to a League meeting."

Yours in League, Ann

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan citizen organization that promotes the informed and active participation of citizens in government, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Any person of voting age, male or female, may become a League member.

This newsletter is published by the League of Women Voters of Albany County, 12 Coventry Road, Glenmont, New York 12077 and mailed to League members. The frequency of publication is as follows: one mid-summer issue followed by nine monthly issues from September to May.

New Members

Bertha Golan - Cohoes

Mary McFerran - Albany

Judith Brink - Albany

Sue Haswell - Slingerlands

Jay Gallagher - Delmar

Emily Gallagher - Delmar

Barbara Cooley - Delmar

John McEneny - Delmar

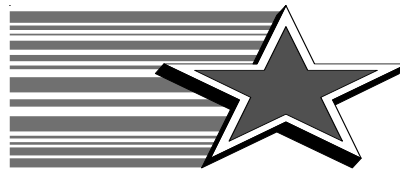
Welcome!

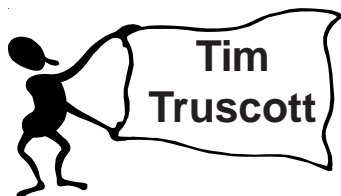
League Names in the News:

Judy Thomson is the new president of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy.

Nell Stokes-Holmes, Personnel Committee Chair, and Stephen Winters, Nominating Committee, for the Capital Area Council of Churches.

Do you know of a special accomplishment of a league member? Contact Ann Brandon, ambrandon2@verizon.net.





League in Profile

I came of age in the '60's when many of us were deeply interested in 1) the Civil Rights Movement, 2) ending the Vietnam War and 3) the Environmental Movement. Coupled with the Environmental Movement was my interest in High Speed Rail, which New York State began pursuing in 1974.

Civil Rights became overshadowed by the Vietnam War and was forced to the wings of the American stage. The Vietnam War (which should have ended in 1968) dragged on for another seven years and finally ended in 1975, perhaps only because Richard Nixon was forced out of office. And the Environmental Movement was severely crippled by the Big Business interests of the Reagan-Bush era., which began in 1981. A consequence of that was the abandonment of High Speed Rail development in New York State in about 1985.

I moved to Albany in 1972 and to downtown Albany in 1974. The Corning-O'Connell Democratic organization in many respects wasn't democratic (especially if you weren't a Democrat), but they always seemed to me to be interested in taking care of the average citizen, the "little guy." I respected that part of their agenda. However, there was no room for you if you weren't a Democrat.

Beginning in the 1980's and continuing until a year or two ago, it seemed like the profit motive was more important in our country than The People. I finally realized that some of the topics of conversation, such as High Speed Rail passenger transportation and solar energy development, were things we had talked about 30 years ago but had been abandoned during the Reagan-Bush years. What was worse, I discovered that younger people were not even aware that these subjects had been pursued 30 years ago. It was like the wheel was going to be re-invented and no one was interested in learning from what had been done before. It was terribly frustrating to me. Government people had no idea how to approach these problems.

It became increasingly apparent to me that the Jennings Administration in the City of Albany was not serving The People and that, as my father had warned me, The People were serving their government. It became more and more obvious that the city was poorly managed and that The People were not being treated fairly. A favored few were profiting and the rest were paying, being kept under the thumb of a greedy, incompetent administration through fear, intimidation and a closed government.

Often times crime, urban blight and environmental problems are the result of bad government. They are not isolated problems or problems that "just happen." They happen because government isn't doing what it should do. They happen because The People's government isn't working for The People.

And that's why I joined the League of Women Voters. To try to change that.



Notes from the February 6th Legislative Breakfast

Assemblyman McEneny said his office gets an average of 3,000 emails a day. The staff cannot deal with all of them. He recommends sending "snail mail" letters. On voting information: he said there isn't enough information on candidates. The government should send information to every household. Also, there

should be more candidate debates. (Poor Mary Ann Lettau.) He also called for a limit on the number of charter schools. Check out Jay Gallagher's blog on the state league website (www.lwvny.org) for his commentary on the event.

Assemblyman Reilly's comments on the state budget. The state doesn't have an economic plan. He evaluates the budget with three principles: 1) it has to be fair, 2) it needs to control spending, 3) the priority should be to our most vulnerable population.

Follow Up on Albany County Long Term Care Issues - A New Study?

In June 2009, the League of Women Voters of Albany County co-hosted with the College of Saint Rose a well-attended public forum on the future of long term care in Albany county. This forum was motivated by a series of contentious Albany County Legislature meetings which culminated in a resolution which demanded that County Executive Breslin publish his vision for long term care. This forum preceded the September 2009 publication of the long term care plan and was, according to County Executive Breslin helpful in codifying all of the issues which needed to be addressed. We highlighted those areas that related to information generated through our forum in the October bulletin. The county plan is available for review at www.albanycounty.org.

Since the fall, the discord between the executive and legislative branches of government continues over the future of the existing Albany County Nursing Home. In Albany, the county-operated home is nearing the end of its useful life and faces major renovation issues. At the February 8, 2010 meeting of the county legislature, which was monitored by League president Ann Brandon and vice-president Jan Messina, a resolution was passed to authorize the installation of a new sprinkler system for the building. At the same meeting, another resolution was authorized to allow an independent contractor an award of \$25,000 to determine the reasons for an ongoing operating deficit of \$18 million for the nursing home. This amount is above the ongoing county support of Medicaid clients who are residents. It represents an operating shortfall that would need to be addressed in the financing of a new home.

Although the County Executive's 2010 budget plans for reducing the shortfall by closing the existing facility and substituting a range of alternatives, the Legislature has subsequently authorized funding for design and consultation work on building a new facility at the site of the former Heritage Park ball field in Colonie. Because the county legislature can authorize a bond issuance for funding a new facility without public vote, it is important for residents to have all of the facts surrounding the costs and benefits for a new facility. Our League will continue to monitor monthly legislature meetings, but we cannot voice any opinions on this to either the county executive's office or the legislature without having member approval to adopt this issue as a local study. If you want the League to consider this as a local issue, please phone Marian Schwager at 439-0344 or email at schwager@nycap.rr.com.

State League News

New 1919 Society

In celebration of the League's ninetieth birthday, the state League has created the 1919 Society to ensure that the League is able to maintain its vibrant reputation in the twenty-first century. To join the 1919 Society, all you have to do is include the LWVNYS in your will. We will not ask for either proof of the bequest or its amount - we just want to honor your future support. As a member, your name will be engraved on a plaque in the state League office, listed in the *State Voter*, and on the website.

You have worked so hard for the League for so many years. Why not help to ensure the future of the League by including support for the League in your will? The process is simple, and we can help you with the correct language. Just contact Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director, LWVNYS, at Laura@lwvny.org or by phone at 518-465-4162 for more information or to join this new Society.

Spring Fling Weekend in NYC

Come spend a fun weekend in NYC with fellow League members - and raise money for the state League. On Friday, May 14, a fundraiser cocktail party will be held at the NYC home of state VP of Issues and Advocacy, Sally Robinson. On Saturday, tours of Ellis Island, tickets to the King Tut Exhibit and tickets to see "South Pacific" at Lincoln Center will be available. Information on other museum exhibits will be distributed as well. A group rate is available at a hotel conveniently located in NYC. Check out the state League website, www.lwvny.org, or call the office at 465-4162 to reserve your tickets. Do it now as tickets are limited!

Forum on Redistricting Reforms

Over 60 people from 9 local Leagues and other organizations attended the Forum on Redistricting held at the Rockefeller Institute on February 9th. Photos from the event are posted on our facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?page=1&aid=144060&id=138506691184>. Videos from the Forum are now available on the Rockefeller Institute website at www.rockinst.org/forumsandevents/.

Consolidating Local Government and Services: Consensus Meeting Background Information

The topic of consolidation of local government services and entities is appearing regularly in newspapers both as information pieces and editorials. It has become very apparent that the local leagues will benefit greatly from the uniform standards for evaluating proposals that are being developed statewide at consensus meetings. Please join us for one of the consensus meetings - on **Monday, March 15** at the Bethlehem Public Library at 6:30 p.m. (after the Souper Supper that starts at 5:30 p.m.) or on **Thursday, March 18** at 9:30 a.m. at the Albany Public Library.

In preparation for the consensus meetings, we encourage you to review the materials on the New York State League of Women Voters web site at http://www.lwvny.org/consolidation_sss.html and review the materials provided below and in past newsletters.

State Financial Assistance

To encourage inter-municipal cooperation in studying whether local government units and services should be dissolved, consolidated, or shared, New York State provides grants and loans to municipalities on a competitive basis to fund studies and offers financial incentives such as increased state aid for costs related to dissolution and consolidation. At the consensus meeting, we will be considering whether these programs are a good idea. Below are some considerations to weigh when deciding whether you support or object to this policy.

GRANTS AND AID

Pro: State grants are awarded for feasibility studies, the cost of which can range from \$20,000 to \$190,000, depending on study complexity. The presence or absence of state assistance could be a factor in whether a local government decides to undertake a study. The availability of funding removes one roadblock to intergovernmental cooperation. State incentive aid for costs related to dissolution and consolidation promotes the state's goal of improving governmental efficiency and is relatively small in the context of the state budget. When the Village of Pike dissolved into the surrounding town, total state aid for the two local governments increased from \$9,474 pre-dissolution to \$67,200 for the new combined entity.

Con: In the case of grants, the state taxpayer is subsidizing local studies that may fail to show efficiencies from dissolving/consolidating or sharing services or may not support any of these options for other reasons. State taxpayers are subsidizing local efforts that have a local impact, not a statewide impact, without state oversight or performance standards. For instance, in many cases of village dissolution, the result is a proliferation of districts to provide the services once provided by a single municipal entity. Grants and aid are a direct transfer of funds and are not intended to be repaid.

LOANS

Pro: Providing loans for upfront funding costs removes a potential impediment to undertaking a study and furthers the state goal of facilitating such local government actions while enabling the state to be repaid over time.

Con: The municipalities may have difficulty repaying the loans in a timely manner, and the addition of debt to the balance sheet of the combined entity may make consolidation less financially attractive. Loans are more complicated than grants to administer, and the debt may increase the municipality's cost of borrowing money in the future.

Intermunicipal Cooperation in Albany County

As we prepare for our consensus meetings, local governments in Albany County are already undertaking studies or have achieved agreements on shared services. The Cities of Cohoes and Watervliet have decided to have one executive director manage their two housing authorities at a savings to Cohoes of \$40,000 to \$50,000. The two cities also have received a state grant of \$45,000 to undertake a joint firefighting study. In 2009, Watervliet and Green Island shared the \$859,000 cost of a new 95 foot aerial ladder truck. As future proposals come up for public participation and review, our local League will be prepared to comment on them because we will have standards developed through consensus with which to evaluate them.

Be sure to come to the consensus meetings and share your point of view.



The NYS Prisoner Justice Conference:

Connecting Regions, Issues, and Strategies
Albany, NY – March 27, 2010

The New York State League will be participating in the Prisoner Justice Conference in Albany on March 27th. All are welcome to attend the daylong event at the First Unitarian Universalist Society, 405 Washington Ave.

The mission of the conference is to bring together the varied and diverse organizations and individuals working for prisoner justice in New York State. Issues to be addressed include public defense, sentencing, racial disparities, Rockefeller drug laws, parole, disenfranchisement, juvenile justice, targeted and vulnerable prison populations (immigrants, Muslims, trans people, political prisoners, mentally ill, elderly, long termers, youth, women), re-entry, prison families, and prison abuse.

There are approximately 90,000 people currently incarcerated in New York's prisons and jails – people of all ages, sexualities, genders, abilities, and documentation statuses. The overwhelming majority are people of color and of low income. Dozens of organizations address issues of concern in regard to prisoners, their families, and those impacted by the criminal justice system. The goal of the Prisoner Justice Conference is to bring these organizations together to share information, energy, strategies, concerns, ideas, best practices, and hopes at the conference itself, and then through ongoing communication after the conference. In this way they hope to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts – a statewide movement for change, justice, compassion, and more human and humane solutions to social problems in place of reliance on incarceration. The state league will be represented by Ann Brandon. For more information and a schedule, go to www.nysprisonerjustice.org.

Member Input on Local Issues for 2010-2011

Most people who know about the League of Women Voters regard it as a reliable and impartial source for information concerning upcoming elections. This usually means that people turn to us for Voter Guides, or to host candidate debates or public forums. Less is known about the League's important role in education and advocacy on public issues which may or may not appear on the ballot but have profound impacts on our daily lives. Issues which gather League attention range from those endorsed by the national league, those adopted every other year through state league conventions and those voted on annually by local leagues. Local issues form a significant thread of membership participation and advocacy and have for the League of Women Voters constituted an important county-wide role for us.

It may seem to some of our League members that we're still early into our exciting year of programs and issues, but in fact, we're mostly done with this season and need to decide on an agenda of our local issues for the coming year. Procedurally, the Board of Directors in its April meeting will propose a set of local issues to be included for discussion and adoption at our annual business meeting in May. During the month of March we hope that League members will give some thought to the existing agenda of local issues, consider whether or not to maintain these, and give us input on what new issues we should adopt. Our League website has a complete listing and some discussion of these. Our local issues currently encompass consensus positions on solid waste management, public access cable television for the city of Albany, a city of Albany civilian police review board, and the greening of Albany County local governments.

Once we have an affirmative vote on a local issue, we follow a process to study it, develop a consensus League position, and then embark on any or all

of the following types of actions: publication of findings from our study, routine monitoring of the issue through attendance at public meetings, syntheses of news coverage, letter writing campaigns, meetings, lobbying, testimony at public meetings, hosting public information forums, and the like. Usually Board members and other interested League members combine their interests and talents to advance our positions. Local topics often form the backbone of our calendar of monthly League meetings. If you are interested in taking a closer look at our current list of local issues or if you want to help propose the set for 2010, we'd like to hear from you. Please contact program vice-president Marian Schwager at 439-0344 or email at schwager@nycap.rr.com.



Update on Albany's Solid Waste Management Plan

Julie Elson

At the February 9th Solid Waste Management Partnership Plan steering committee meeting, the committee members' comments on the draft were discussed. The draft can be found at <http://www.capitalregionlandfill.com/management> then click on Preliminary Draft Solid Waste Management Plan. No changes have been made to the draft as yet based on the comments, There will be a follow-up meeting of the steering committee prior to delivery of the draft to the Albany Common Council for review. This meeting will occur on March 2, 2010 at 4:00 pm at 200 Henry Johnson Boulevard Albany, New York.

There have been articles and letters to the editor in the Times Union which say the Plan advocates an incinerator. But in actuality, the plan does not advocate nor did the committee advocate, any one technology over another. That was not the charge to this committee. What is recommended is that the best way to manage the trash is through a better partnership with other surrounding communities, possibly expanding the planning unit (municipalities) and regionalizing all of our efforts. There is discussion that enforcing current municipal recycling ordinances as well as expanding recycling per DEC's goals of reduce, reuse, recycle be emphasized. Expanding efforts to reduce the waste stream could mean promoting product stewardship (would require legislation) and waste minimization through Pay As You Throw and back yard composting.

The concept of the actual nature of this management entity - whether it be an AUTHORITY or a different type of organization was and is a significant area of contention, and hopefully will receive more attention in the draft submitted to the Common Council. With regards to incineration, Clough Harbour & Assoc LLP(CHA), with the committee's consent, used readily available historical data from incinerator plants in the United States to estimate costs to build and run the treatment plants. The logic was that the newer technologies currently used in Europe do not have the lengthy historical financial data needed to make the most accurate estimates. This can and has been construed as favoring incineration. One of the committee's requests was that a glossary be added to help readers understand technical terms and acronyms. An example of the need for definition is the term waste to energy (WTE) which some people interpret as burn/incineration only, while it actually encompasses some biological/mechanical processes, the end product of which are a fuel substance.

A representative of Waste Management (a private hauler) made a very telling observation near the end of the Feb 9 meeting regarding the difficulties encountered by commercial enterprises attempting to recycle. He told of a retail company which had taken over an existing empty store building, refurbished it and made arrangements for the separation/recycling of its solid waste stream. They ran into a problem with the municipality which delayed their store's opening. The original retailer had used one dumpster and had built a municipality- required enclosure for that one dumpster. However, recycling requires several dumpsters. The new dumpsters were located outside the enclosure and failed the municipality inspection. It would seem that such local rules should be examined to see if changes need to be made to encourage rather than discourage commercial recycling.

Membership 2009-2010 - Join & Make a Difference

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address, City, Zip: _____

Email: _____

Individual Membership \$50/year

Contribution in support of my local League

Household Membership \$75/year

Student Membership \$15/year

Please send me more information

Mail to:

League of Women Voters of Albany County PO Box 611, Slingerlands, NY 12159

Or Contact: Carol Webster (439-1491)

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALBANY COUNTY
PO Box 611
Slingerlands, NY 12159

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League Calendar

<u>WHEN</u>	<u>WHAT</u>	<u>WHERE</u>	<u>MORE INFO</u>
Mar. 8, 9:30 am	Great Decisions	Home of R. Redlich	
Mar. 15, 5:30 pm	Souper Supper	Bethlehem Library, Delmar	see pages 1, 5
	Consensus Mtg. on Local Consolidation and Shared Services		
Mar. 18, 9:30 am	Consensus Mtg .	Albany Public Library	see pages 1, 5
Mar. 18	Deadline for April Bulletin	LBierman@nycap.rr.com	
Mar. 20, 9:30 am	Meet and Greet Coffee	Home of C. Webster	see page 1
Mar. 22, 9:30 am	Great Decisions	Home of M. Moehringer	
Mar. 27	NYS Prisoner Justice Conf.	UU Society, Albany	see page 6
Apr. 15, 5:30 pm	Souper Supper	Slingerlands United Methodist Church	
	Topic: Climate Change	Speaker: Denise Sheehan	
Apr. 20	Equal Pay Day 2010	Legislative Office Building, Albany	
May 18, 5:30 pm	Annual Dinner & Mtg.	Century House, Latham	
	90th Anniversary League Celebration with Visit from Susan B. Anthony		