

oter



September 2016

League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area



Get out the vote project

The League of Women Voters is collaborating on a project partially funded by the Unitarian Universalist Funding Association to “Get Out the Vote.” Our primary efforts will run from the middle of September through Oct. 23, when we expect people to get more excited about voting and early voting, and candidate information will be available.

If you walk your neighborhood and would like to distribute handouts in your area, contact arlisolson@att.net.

Arlis Olson, the league representative, is planning a champagne brunch at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 24. We need a commitment from LWV members to attend and help us walk this neighborhood. We will keep the walking to under an hour. If you can't walk but would like to help, we can always use someone to assist getting the food organized.

We are not planning to talk to people, only to leave information at the door. We will be distributing information on early voting times and places. We will have voter registration cards and LWV Voters Guides available on request as well as candidate information printed by the San Antonio Express-News.

Arlis lives right off of I-10 (Exit 583) on the East Side. Contact: arlisolson@att.net

Civic Engagement: How To Select A Candidate

Elections present voters with important choices. Whether it's a local race that will affect your community or a national race that could change the direction of the country, it's a time to consider the issues that you care about and decide which candidate you support. Come find out some essential points to consider and get registered to vote in this important election year! Presented in conjunction with the League of Women Voters, Mi Familia Vota, and NALEO.

September 26th & 27th, 6pm

September 26th- Bazan, McCreless, and Pan American Branch Libraries

September 27th- Memorial Branch Library

Hill Country faces serious problems

The futures of the Hill Country and the urban counties along the I-35 corridor are tightly interwoven, and unless they start working to support each other, the entire region faces serious problems over the next few decades as the area's population soars.

That was the message about 30 members of five area leagues heard Aug. 6 at the Bulverde Spring Branch Library at a workshop on regional planning for the Texas Hill Country sponsored by the LWV-Comal Area.

Members of the San Antonio, Comal, Hill Country, Hays County and Austin leagues heard presentations by LWV-Austin member Britin Bostick, a recent honors graduate of the University of Texas with a master of science in community and regional planning and another in public affairs; and by LWV-San Antonio member

Annalisa Peace, executive director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance.

Later, under the guidance of LWV-Comal member and LWV-Texas Land Use Issue Chair Jensie Madden, the group discussed how growth impacts local areas and what local organizations can do to help; and what advocacy positions the league can take in 2017 relevant to land use.

Bostick, who now has her own consulting firm that specializes in place planning, pragmatic preservation and policy, is a descendant of one of the families that originally settled Kerr County. Her knowledge and her love for the area run deep.

"The way that we've viewed this area is two different components," she said. "We've defined it as four urban corridor counties along I-35 – Travis, Hays, Comal and Bexar – and

13 more rural counties.

"These all work together as one ecosystem. We've traditionally viewed this as us vs. them.... It can't be us vs. them anymore. It's got to be considered the Greater Hill Country area for a lot of reasons."

She pointed out statistics that showed that at the current rapid growth rate, the 17-county Greater Hill Country could double its population, to almost 7 million people, by 2050. The last drought, which lasted five years, reduced Travis County's water capacity to about 33 percent.

"If you double the population and take away 2/3 of the water, we're in a real big crunch," she said. "And what that means is that economically, we're not going to be stable. When you put these things together, it paints a picture that we need a really solid plan for the future."

A large part of the problem is that most of the water comes from the rural area and most of it is used in the urban area.

"When it's raining out here," she said, pointing to the rural area on a map, "and it's all being consumed right here," she said, pointing to the I-35 corridor, "you can start to see that there's a relationship between these two places. And you can't say we don't have anything to do with out there."

As more people move to the rural areas, development occurs on what was once agricultural land in unincorporated areas, where there are no land use regulations. Impervious cover and pollution become problems over the aquifer.

Bostick gave examples of other

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Annalisa Peace, executive director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, speaks about the advocacy work her group does at the state legislature.

parts of the country where rural and urban areas came together to help solve problems. Keep Tahoe Blue was formed decades ago to maintain Lake Tahoe's successful tourist industry while keeping its pristine waters and surrounding land natural. California's Napa Valley achieved a balance that allowed the vineyards to continue growing some of the best wine grapes in the world while becoming a sought-after place to live.

That's what she'd like to help the Hill Country do – work together on common goals instead of everyone working separately on their own problems and needs.

Annalisa Peace, executive director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and a member of the LVW – San Antonio Area, talked about the advocacy work her organization has done in the past and its legislative priorities for the upcoming session. The GEAA includes 52 groups in the region that covers the Edwards and Trinity aquifers and over to the coast where the waters flow into the bays and estuaries.

She talked about a HB 595, a bill introduced in 2009 that would have prohibited the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality from authorizing discharge of domestic sewage effluent into any water in the contributing or recharge zones of the San Antonio or Barton Springs segments of the Edwards Aquifer. The bill was left in committee.

She gave an example of why the bill was needed. She said it is not uncommon for subdivisions to initially discharge their waste water onto undeveloped land, which filters the water before it enters the aquifer. But eventually the developer builds out that land and applies to amend the permit to directly discharge into waterways that recharge the Edwards Aquifer.

“That means there is no filtration



Members of five LVW chapters listen raptly as they learn about how water policy is affecting the amount and quality of the drinking water in the 17 counties that make up the Greater Hill Country.

there,” she said.

“And it is really a disgusting practice. And the TCEQ is perfectly fine with that.”

GEAA contests many of these permits, she said, but it is very expensive – as much as \$100,000 per permit. And legislation that passed last session makes it impossible for GEAA to help contest the permits. That's one reason the law needs to be passed, she said.

Another is something called emerging contaminants. While the focus has been on stormwater runoff, experts say the bigger problem in the future will be on sewage runoff because of chemical and microbial elements that have not been considered contaminants in the past. But unmetabolized drugs and possibly fatal bacteria, many of which have unknown effects, have been found in sewage that, without bills like HB 595, go directly into the Edwards Aquifer.

After discussion and questions about what the group had heard, Comal's Madden led a discussion of

possible legislative action related to land and water use the state league could take this year. From a long list of choices the group suggested, the two that most resonated were banning the discharge of sewage effluent into the water over the Edwards Aquifer recharge and contributing zones; and authorizing Hill Country counties to regulate land development in unincorporated areas if their voters agree.

It was also decided to pose questions to candidates in the upcoming Voters Guides about their stands on water issues.

As the discussion continued, everyone came to the understanding that water and land use are really one issue. Each affects the other so intimately that they are impossible to separate.

The day was packed so full of information that this story doesn't begin to include it all. Feel free to talk to Sybil Morgan, Marian Edson or Glenda Wolin, who attended. Any questions they can't answer, they'll know to whom to direct you to find out.

Conducting an election is a big job

Part 1 of a 2-part story on the Bexar County Elections Department

Not all Texas counties have elections administrators. In fact, just 107 of the state's 254 counties do. Until the 1980s, county clerks were in charge of elections and tax assessors were in charge of voter registration. Then it was proposed that counties establish an elections administrator position if the tax assessor and clerk agreed. Fewer than half did.

Fortunately for Bexar County, both agreed to develop the position of the Bexar County Elections Administrator, and we now have Jacquelyn Callanen (honored at the 2015 LWV Bravo Luncheon) in that post. She is widely admired for the efficiency, integrity and transparency with which she runs her small office, meeting the needs of almost 1,013,000 registered voters (as of late August) in Bexar County with a staff of 19, supplemented, as funds allow, during major primaries and elections with temporary/part-time employees. By comparison, Tarrant County (part of the Dallas-Fort Worth area), which has about 5 percent more registered voters, has approximately double the staff.

To understand the scope of the Bexar County Elections Department, keep in mind that there are 712 voting precincts, 53 political subdivisions, 20 independent school districts, 29 cities, a three-part military

installation (Joint Base San Antonio, consisting of Lackland AFB, Fort Sam Houston and Randolph AFB) and over one million registered voters. In 2015, Bexar County Elections managed 14 elections. Consider that each election requires:

- ▶ A budget
- ▶ Advance publication of dates and times, candidates and issues
- ▶ Hiring, training and placement of part-time election officials and clerks (of which one per voting loca-

A presidential election costs upward of \$1.8 million.

tion needs to be bilingual)

- ▶ Checking, repairing, and transporting voting machines, computers, signs, and other election equipment and supplies
- ▶ Recruiting, training and hiring people to staff phone banks to assist election officials and technicians with unusual circumstances
- ▶ Recruiting, training and hiring mobile technicians to troubleshoot or replace problem machines
- ▶ The intake, organization, and verification of mail-in ballots and provisional ballots and attending documentation.

Each election budget and payroll for temporary employees must be approved by the Bexar County Commissioners Court. The County Election Commission (county judge, county clerk, tax assessor-collector

and Republican and Democratic party chairs) has the charge to hire (and, if need be, fire) the elections administrator for the county. The county has to fund the administrator's office at the same rate that it funded the process under the county clerk and tax assessor-collector. But the elections administrator does not determine how many elections to mount. This makes annual budgeting difficult because school districts and other entities often call special elections to replace people who do not serve out their terms.

Funding

The state allocates 25 cents per registered voter. Bexar County gets approximately \$375,000 every two years for part-time help. This is a factor, as it is impossible to run 288 polling locations for countywide elections with just 19 employees. As a result, those employees spend a great deal of time recruiting, training and supporting a small army of part-time/temporary election judges and clerks, technicians, phone operators and warehouse employees on an as-needed basis. Even a small election involving less than 10 percent of the registered voters can cost about \$100,000 to mount. A presidential election costs upward of \$1.8 million.

Also, the Texas Election Code requires that polling locations be published in the most widely circulated newspaper. The Express News charges \$18,000 per page to publish polling locations, which take two pages. The state pays for major elections. However, it falls to the county to pay for primary elections, which are technically party-controlled.

Equipment

As a result of the Help America

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Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, Congress provided funding to states to implement minimum standards to improve election administration nationwide. The standards included requirements to supply certain voting information to the public, offer provisional voting options, create statewide voter registration databases, establish uniform voter identification procedures, update and upgrade voting equipment, and establish administrative complaint procedures. The Bexar County Elections Department has done an exemplary job of implementing these standards – with one glaring exception.

Thirteen years ago, the counties in Texas bought new voting equip-

ment and leased them to cities for elections. Our 2,843 machines are 13 years old. They work only with Windows XP, which Microsoft no longer supports. Each election, despite thorough interim maintenance, the elections department has to hold more than 100 machines in reserve to be driven out to polling places to replace those that break down.

The Federal Elections Administration has researched and extensively tested new voting machines, now in use in several states, that have new features that increase ease of use, time efficiency and ballot integrity. For example, the voter can mark a ballot at home, which is then converted to a QR code on a smart phone. Then,

after being qualified at the poll, the voter simply holds the phone to the voting machine to mark the ballot and register the vote. Then the voter receives a paper copy of the ballot that verifies the accuracy of the vote and could be used in a recount.

However, Texas, which insists on doing its own election machine testing, has not made any effort to adopt the new machines. So, even if the County Commissioners were to approve the \$12 million to \$18 million needed to replace Bexar County's aged voting machines, it would not be permitted by the state.

Next month: Personnel and how we can help

Patty Manea joins League

New member Patty Manea is a full-time online student at the University of Texas, Arlington; oncology research nurse at Cancer Care Centers of South Texas; patient advocate at state and federal levels; president of the Leon Valley Board of Economic Development and member of the Board of Adjustment; and breast cancer survivor since 2005.

Patty received her associate's degree in nursing in Canada 1992 and then moved to Texas. In her online studies she is working on an RN to BSN to MSN program and is a member of the UTA Honor Society.

For the past 15 years she has worked in an outpatient oncology / hematology facility in various roles and currently is a research nurse at Cancer Care Centers of South Texas.

Reaching many health care providers as a nurse speaker is a way to pay it forward, recharge the passion for making the cancer patients a focus but also giving everyone the tools needed to be a great patient advocate.



St. Philip's College voter registration

LWV member Sybil Morgan, with friend Dianne Fetchick, joined alumni members of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, from left, Lt. Col. Dexter Sadler, Ronnell Bright, Vincent Washington, Lars Allen and Alvin Brown, in registering almost 40 voters at new student orientation Aug. 22 at St. Philip's College.

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Planning Commission seeks applicants to fill vacancies

The San Antonio Planning Commission, which advises the City Council on the master plan for the physical development of San Antonio, is looking for applicants to fill vacancies.

Annalisa Peace, a league member and the executive director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, is urging interested league members to apply to help balance the industry-dominated board.

“Over-representation of vested interests has resulted in hundreds of decisions that have diminished quality of life here in San Antonio, exemplified most recently by the 5-4 vote to remove Dark Skies and Impervious Cover recommendations from San Antonio’s Comprehensive Plan,” she said.

Regularly-scheduled meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 2 p.m. Each term is two years.

To apply, go to the City’s web-based application for boards and commissions at <https://webapp9.sanantonio.gov/BoardCommApplication/Vacancies>

For assistance with the application, contact Brandon Smith, Boards & Commissions Coordinator, at 210-207-7253.

Applications must be received by Sept. 12.

If you apply to serve on the Planning Commission, contact your City Council representative to inform him/her that you would like to serve. The Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance would also appreciate a heads up on your application; please contact Annalisa Peace at Annalisa@AquiferAlliance.org.

Upcoming Events

Volunteer Deputy Registrars

Classes for people who want to become Volunteer Deputy Registrars and register voters before the Nov. 8 election will be held on Saturday, Sept. 10, at 10 a.m.; Tuesday, Sept. 13, at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.; and Saturday, Sept. 27, at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. To register for the class, call Bexar County Elections at (210) 335-6625.

Planning Commission Vacancy

Deadline for applying for vacancy on Planning Commission is Sept. 12. Applications are available online. See link in story above.

Champagne Breakfast

Champagne Breakfast before blockwalking to distribute handouts with early voting information, Sept. 24, 9:30 a.m., at Arlis Olson’s house near I-10 exit 583. For address and more details, contact arlisolson@att.net

Bravo Luncheon

Bravo Luncheon fundraiser honoring Amy Hardberger is Oct. 12 at 11:30 a.m. at Magnolia Gardens. Tickets are available at www.bit.ly/bravoawards

Early voting

Early voting for the Nov. 8 primary begins Oct. 24. Last day to register for the election is Oct. 11.