

President's Message

## Look forward to 2021

I hope all of you found a way to give thanks on the recent Thanksgiving holiday and stay safe. Our family gathering was much smaller this year but we were able to reach out via Zoom and connect, as well as enjoy the usual turkey, dressing and side dishes. More leftovers to be creative with!

Our local league is finishing up the Criminal Justice Reform Study by holding a consensus meeting on December 9; our recommendations will be sent to the state League. Thank you to all who presented, participated or viewed the videos of our fall presentations on CJR. A big shout out to Ron and Cheryl Budzinski for taking the lead on this project!

As we close 2020, and look beyond to 2021, the LWVUS is focusing on telling our story at state and local levels. The five areas identified are:

**Activities during the 2020 election season**

**2021 Legislative priorities at state and national levels**

**Communication activities**

**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts**

**Organization and Advocacy.**

Our local League will be working on these areas and will need input from members, as well as participation. Remember to put January 23, 2021 on your calendar for the annual Program Planning meeting. This is a time for members to identify topics for meetings during the year that are of current concern in the communities we serve, as well as projects where the League can make an impact. In addition, we will be planning our budget for the 2021-2022 year and the Nominating Committee will be recruiting Board members for open positions. Per our by-laws, the program events, nominating slate and budget must be approved by the Board in March prior to publishing in the April Voter, which is 30 days prior to our May 2021 Annual Meeting.

———— Constance Romanus, LWVGP President

## Important Dates:

**6 p.m. Wed., Dec. 2:** Criminal Justice Q & A, via Zoom.  
**6 p.m. Wed., Dec. 9:** Consensus for Criminal Justice Reform, via Zoom.  
**Mon., Dec. 14:** Electoral College votes.  
**12:30 Mon., Dec. 14:** LWVGP Board Meeting, via Zoom.  
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**Drinks & Dialogue** is on hiatus until January.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE UPDATE STUDY LWVIL, Dec. 2 & 9**

The Criminal Justice Update Study is winding up with two meetings in early December, both via Zoom.

At 6 p.m. Wed., Dec. 2, we will talk about the criminal justice questions and issues. Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85720385444?pwd=SFE0O-FUzZENZMHY3RTRqZINxQXVBZz09> The meeting ID is : 857 2038 5444 and Passcode is 986723.

Then, at 6 p.m. Wed., Dec. 9 we will hold a 90-minute LWV Greater Peoria and LWV Kewanee Consensus meeting on Zoom. Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88934382121?pwd=RHIBak5SaJITUM3R1hvbTRTUGFEZ-z09> The Meeting ID is 889 3438 2121 and Passcode is 45116.

Irene Pritzker will be the moderator for the consensus meeting. Lisa Uphoff will be the Recorder. Neither have been resources for criminal justice questions, but both have participated in our Consensus meetings on other topics.

Irene will use the Power Point presentation and read each question. (More information about the questions will be posted on [lwvgp.org](http://lwvgp.org).) She will ask for response and accept discussion for and against. She will suggest whether she hears agreement for or against or no substantial agreement. There needs to be substantial agreement to have “consensus.” If there is a strong concern by most participating, that can be included in the “Notes” section of the response form.

Interesting that some new research was highlighted last week by the state study committee which contradicted previous research already referred to in the study material. At the end of the discussion, Leaguers agreed that the official positions need to be broad in nature.

What happens with our consensus? Lisa will submit the form to LWVIL Issues Committee. The Criminal Justice Update Committee will compile the results

of all the Illinois Leagues' reports and suggest a revised position which will be submitted to the LWVIL Board for approval, revision, or rejection. That revised position will be voted on by the delegates at the June 2021 LWVIL Convention.

This consensus process, done by a majority of local Leagues in Illinois and affirmed by delegates at our state convention, is a most grassroots engagement of our LWVIL members. And, yes, some studies are national studies and use the same process. Recent national studies include: Money in Politics, national Healthcare, gun control, etc.

The three meetings already held – presented by Peoria and Kewanee Leaguer “Resources” — did not provoke many questions. Surely there are some strong feelings for or against some of the 14 sections of questions. Join us.

—— Cheryl Budzinski, CJ study group co-leader

## **VOTER SERVICES**

Well, the municipal elections are starting to heat up already.

As a reminder, the primary is February 23, 2021 and the general election is April 6, 2021. In many communities, city council members are up for election in addition to other municipal positions.

The mayor's race in the City of Peoria has an open seat as incumbent Jim Ardis has chosen not to run for re-election this spring. As of this writing there are six declared candidates with the final day to file petitions on Nov. 23. Current candidates include three current members of the Council – Rita Ali, Jim Montelongo and Sid Ruckreigel. The other candidates include the Reverend Chuck Brown, Andy Diaz, Chama St. Louis, and Couri Thomas. Several district council positions look to be contested races also.

LWVGP will collaborate with WCBU, Peoria Public Radio and the Peoria Public Library in scheduling candidate forums in some of these races.

Other communities have important races also; an example is the position of Mayor of Washington. Incumbent Gary Manier is being challenged by Alderman Lilija Stevens.

Watch future issues of The Voter for more information on League hosted candidate forums or contact Roberta Parks at 309-231-1724

—— Roberta Parks

## PEORIA CITY COUNCIL, Nov. 10

There were several interesting and controversial topics at the Nov. 10 meeting of the Peoria City Council: Township of Peoria purchase of a downtown building for offices; budget revisions, including possible referendum to fund public safety pensions; and, again, short-term rentals being allowed in all residentially zoned areas. And, again, the short-term rental issue was deferred.

**Re: Township** - Township Supervisor Frank Abdnour proposed the township purchase a building on Main Street that would save money from the current cost of renting space on Adams Street from the City. The building is larger than needed and would need renovations. Supervisor Abdnour had some costs identified. His plan is to allow certain 501(c)(3) organizations to have space in exchange renovations and ongoing utility costs. He explained townships do include senior facilities in their portfolio in various parts of Illinois. This passed after many questions and concerns, including the council wishing to see the renovation estimates. Councilperson Denise Moore offered to help Abdnour get bids from minority contractors.

Budget revision for 2021 was possibly precipitated by the Fair Tax referenda failing since staff/mayor stated their original budget included numbers from the state based on passage of the referendum. These are interesting highlights from the meeting documents:

**STAFFING:** As of Oct. 15, there are 614 full-time City employees. Looking for \$10 million of operational reductions: 36 vacant positions were eliminated; an early retirement incentive was implemented, in which seven of 52 eligible employees have opted to retire; a voluntary separation initiative was implemented for firefighters and 10 have opted to retire; eight employees will be laid off by January 1. (The early retirement incentive window is open through July 31, 2021.)

**CSO (combined sewer overflow) federal mandate** required the City of Peoria to develop a long-term plan to reduce the incidence of overflows from combined storm/sanitary sewers, which discharge untreated sewage 20 to 30 times per year into the Illinois River during heavy rains and snow melt events. The city's green solution (including fixing existing infrastructure using local contractors and labor) will cost more than \$100 million over the next 18 years. While the funding for the CSO fix begins in 2022 through 2025 budget, funding is being sought through the state and through sewer fees and the 2018 stormwater fees already in place. (Note the stormwater fee is billed to all property owners based on impervious area.)

**Debt Service** increases 98.8% or \$9,837,837 to \$19,972,352 in 2021. The City Council voted to restructure and "refund" debt service payments in 2020 to not make 2020 debt payments (\$722,000 of interest savings in 2020 to be paid another year.)

**Residential Garbage Fee** will increase to \$22 per month, an increase of 9.4% to \$9,570,846 to be collected in 2021.

**Public Safety Pension Fee** expires in 2021. Without additional revenue to fund public safety pensions by 2023, \$1 out of every \$8 in the General Fund would be devoted to pensions – and that dollar will increase until the funds are exhausted.

**REFERENDUM DISCUSSION on PUBLIC SAFETY PENSIONS** -The City Council has the ability to increase property taxes for public safety pensions simply by a vote of the City Council. Discussion initially was about six options of advisory referendum language to establish/fund a Fire Protection Tax or Police Protection Tax - the Firefighters Pension Fund Tax (40 ILCS 5/4-118) and the Police Pension Fund Tax (40 ILCS 5/3-125). The City can levy whatever rate is necessary to produce a sum sufficient to meet the needs of the funds. Currently the City does not levy a Fire Protection Tax or a Police Protection Tax.

Both statutes allow the City to implement a rate of up to 0.075% without referendum. This tax may be increased up to 0.6% with a referendum. To collect an additional \$4 million in property taxes to cover Public Safety pension costs, an increase of \$83.33 in real estate taxes for the owner of a \$125,000 home; a house valued at \$225,000 would increase \$150. Or making cuts to save that \$4 million per year, the City would have to cut 26 police and fire positions each year. That means three more engine companies and 33 firefighters and 45 police officers over the next three years.

—— Cheryl Budzinski, Observer

### **PEORIA CITY/COUNTY LANDFILL COMMITTEE: Didn't meet Nov. 18**

A cancellation notice for the Peoria City/County Landfill Committee's regular meeting, scheduled for Nov. 18, was posted Nov. 17 on the city's website. The next scheduled meeting is Dec. 16.

—— Joyce Blumenshine, Observer

### **PEORIA HOUSING AUTHORITY: Meetings not held**

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Peoria Housing Authority was scheduled for 4:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 2. Chairman Carl Cannon cancelled the meeting at 4:50 p.m. due to lack of quorum. There was no audio for guests and it appeared that no business was discussed.

Communication with administrative staff on November 16 said the November meeting would not be rescheduled. The next regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners is set for 4:30 p.m. Mon., Dec. 2.

Special meeting scheduled for November 13 was not held.

—— Connie Romanus, Observer

## **PEORIA COUNTY BOARD, Nov. 12**

The regular meeting of the Peoria County Board was held Nov. 12, with board members social distancing in the County Board room. Everyone was wearing masks due to the ongoing pandemic.

The public can access the meetings via Facebook or YouTube. Public seating is not available in the board room due to COVID spacing. Chairman Andrew Rand called the meeting to order and commented it was likely the last time for an in-person meeting for this year considering rising COVID rates.

Before the Moment of Silence Rand requested thoughts for the family of Bonnie Hester on her passing. He praised her service as a previous County Board member and as a tireless worker for the health department and the community.

County Clerk Rachael Parker called the roll. Member Phil Salzer was attending the meeting by phone. Board member Matt Windish was not present. The previous meeting minutes were approved. There was a motion approved for the Suspension of the Board Rules so members could vote by phone.

Proclamations recognized:

Dr. David Trachtenbarg for 27 years of service to the Peoria County Board of Health and work on the computerized immunization task force, as well as other projects.

Board Member Rob Reneau, who was named the 2020 Illinois State Police Forensic Scientist of the Year. Comments included his distinguished work as the state-wide biometric coordinator.

Recognition of November 28th as Small Business Saturday. Small businesses have particularly been impacted by COVID and people are encouraged to support and shop small businesses.

In written public comments, Hedy Elliott-Gardner had concerns for the vacant Harrison and McKinley school buildings in south Peoria. Windows are broken out and the buildings pose a public health threat as they are infested with rodents. The old Harrison school has hundreds of old tires stored inside it which are a health risk and also a fire hazard. It was requested that there be a change in policy that such property cannot be sold unless the buyer has proof of financial ability and that if a new school is built the old school must be demolished.

Two items were removed from the consent agenda. An intergovernmental agreement for county-owned space at One Technology Plaza, which is used by the

Illinois Department of Human Services, was sent back to committee because the lease has expired. Provisions for new carpeting need to be worked out, as well.

- o A Special Use was approved for a property owner who wants to divide 5.06 acres from an existing 65.9-acre parcel. The Agricultural Preservation Zoning District requires 40 acres. The County Zoning Board of Appeals recommended approval and the Land Use Committee agreed. There was no discussion and the motion was approved with 17 ayes.

- o Sale of properties in the City of Peoria that were listed for delinquent taxes was approved after deferral from the October board meeting, 17-0.

- o A \$109,544 grant from the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) for funding safe and secure elections was approved. Peoria Election Commission Director Tom Bride said the County has been awarded three grants to help with election expenses, including added COVID costs. Two of the grants are restricted to certain expenses, with one of those only covering postage costs. The CTCL grant can be applied to general 2020 election expenses and requires the grant expenditures to be reported back by the end of the year. The state elections commissions group had alerted County Election Commissioners about this grant and it will help relieve budget pressures this year for the elections office and extra costs they had. Bride made clear nothing is being asked in return for the grant other than the final report of expenditures. He said the County is not being asked to do anything specific to receive the grant other than show how the funds were spent.

Chairman Rand commented that he doesn't feel he knows enough about the CTCL and he did a quick search and found out their funders include Google, Facebook and other sources. He questioned what is known about their policies such as for diversity and equal employment. Board member Steve Rieker commented he had similar questions. He asked Bride to be sure the grant sponsors are not asking for anything back, we are not providing any data except the grant application and the report back which shows how the money was spent. Chairman Rand said he would not be supporting this because he doesn't feel he knows enough background and it is a lot of money with no strings attached. Board member Brian Elsasser said he is not worried about the granters asking for anything from the county but wanted to be sure legal counsel had looked at the grant documents. The board's attorney assured the board she had read the document and there were no strings attached. She said the funding does have to be spent in 2020 and any funding not spent has to be returned. The grant funding approval was 15 ayes and 2 nays.

- o County Administrator Scott Sorrell and the Operations Committee requested approval of a collective bargaining agreement between the County and LIUNA



Local 165, which is the union covering employees at PCAPS, the Peoria County Animal Protective Services. The financial package is a three-year agreement which begins Dec. 1 with a 0% wage increase. Year two has a 2% increase and in 2022 there is a 2½% increase. Board member Rob Reneau was thanked; good work with the negotiations and staff was credited. This was approved with 17 ayes.

- o On a unanimous vote, board rules were suspended so the declaration of the COVID emergency in Peoria County could be extended. The item had not come to the agenda through the committee process. The declaration passed unanimously.

- o Board member Jimmy Dillon said there should be a final copy of a plan to reorganize the board after an executive committee meeting Dec. 2. The last meeting of this board will be Dec. 7.

Finally, Chairman Rand said all board members have received a copy of the budget plan. He thanked all elected officials, and particularly Chief Judge Paul Gillan, for adding what was needed. The county's 2021 revenues are \$20.9 million less than the adopted 2020 plan, so he thanked County Administrator Sorrell and all those who have worked since April to take some really difficult steps. The County is balancing its budget. Chairman Rand said this is an extraordinary moment to cut \$20 million, considering COVID, the economy, unemployment, and all the other issues. He thanked all who came to meetings and helped.

Meeting adjourned about 7:10 p.m.

——— Joyce Blumenshine, Observer

## **PEORIA COUNTY ELECTION COMMISSION, Nov. 10**

The Peoria County Board of Election Commissioners met on Tuesday, Nov. 10, with only Commissioner Sandra Burke absent.

Under expenses, the only thing of note was a mistake on the Verizon bill, which was \$67,000 instead of the \$4,000 that should have been charged. It seems Verizon wanted to be paid for increased use for the whole year instead of just the short period of additional use during the election.

Peoria County received \$246,000 from the CARES Act, and everything had to be reported by the coming Friday. Director Tom Bride said \$56,000 still remains, but has probably already been spent. The postage grant was for \$87,575, but only about \$60,000 has been used. The \$75,000 CTCL grant has few limitations, and Director Bride is hoping to use all of it. He is considering hazard pay for election day judges, but wants to see what other jurisdictions are doing.

The Election Office actually received four ballots that day, mostly from overseas, and they had 20 to 25 that were challenged. The breakdown for how people



voted went like this: approximately 39,000 vote by mail, 31,000 election day voting, and 29,000 early voting. 355 provisional ballots needed to be adjudicated before the Nov. 17 certification date. Vote totals surpassed the 2008 presidential election. Over 10,000 voters signed up for Ballot Trax. The current voting equipment will probably be fine for the spring elections, but it is obviously at the end of its useful life.

Public comments included a complaint of more training needed on when to use provisional ballots. There seemed to be one precinct in particular where this was an issue.

—— Irene Pritzker, Observer



Join LWVIL for a virtual group tour of the Illinois Holocaust Museum exhibit, Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Presented by the museum's Chief Curator of Collections and Exhibitions Arielle Weininger, the tour includes a discussion the life of RBG and the history of the exhibition, using audio, video, and photographs of artifacts from the exhibit. The tour is followed by a live Q&A.

Choose from two virtual tour opportunities:

Tuesday, December 8, Noon–1:00 pm  
Thursday, December 10, 6:00 pm–7:00 pm

Space is limited and open to League members only. Tickets are \$5.00. Attendees will receive access information prior to the event. Get tickets at: <https://lwwil.z2systems.com/np/clients/lwwil/eventRegistration.jsp?event=75&>



League of Women Voters  
of Greater Peoria

413 W. Lawndale Ave., Peoria, IL 61604

ON THE WEB: [www.lwvgp.org](http://www.lwvgp.org)

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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**League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria Board of Directors  
2020-2021**

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