

President's Message

## Resolve to keep going in 2021

I hope you had a safe holiday season and look forward to defending democracy again this year — even if we must do so remotely for the time being!

The November 2020 election highlighted the divisions between voters in our country . . . but it also resulted in record turnout. Regardless of our political differences, let's take time to find common ground and make all of our voices heard. Let's help voters stay engaged by participating in the upcoming municipal elections. National elections are important, but civic engagement at all levels is critical to making democracy work.

Voters will be asked to select mayors, city council members, school board members and other positions this spring. The League will help voters become educated on issues and candidates through the Illinois Voters Guide and local candidate forums. Applications to vote by mail are available online or by phone from each county's election commission.

If you don't get such information in email updates from the national League, sign up at the bottom of the [lww.org](http://lww.org) home page. For state updates, sign up at [www.lwvil.org](http://www.lwvil.org) under News.

And make a resolution to get involved in an issue that is important to you!

LWVGP nominating committee will be looking for members to serve on the LWVGP board for the 2021-23 term. If you are interested, contact me at [cro-manus1249@yahoo.com](mailto:cro-manus1249@yahoo.com)

LWVIL also has board openings for 2021-23. State board members have a wide range of experiences and qualifications, but share commitment to increasing civic engagement. To apply, check <https://forms.gle/z47GWrGpv1hs3SSj6> . For questions, contact Hilary Denk at [hdenk@lwvil.org](mailto:hdenk@lwvil.org). Deadline is Jan. 29.

Meanwhile, stay safe and mask up!

———— Constance Romanus, LWVGP President

## Important Dates:

**Wed., Jan. 6:** Electoral College certifies.

**12:30 p.m. Mon., Jan. 11:** LWVGP Board meeting, via Zoom.

**5:30 p.m. Thurs., Jan. 21:** Peoria Mayoral Candidate Forum, available on Facebook & WCBU.

**9:30 a.m. Sat., Jan. 23:** LWVGP Annual Planning meeting, via Zoom.

**Drinks & Dialogue** is on hiatus.



## VOTER SERVICES

The League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria is pleased to partner with WCBU Peoria Public Radio and the Peoria Public Library to host a mayoral candidate forum from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 21.

The forum includes Peoria's five mayoral candidates: Rita Ali, Andres Diaz, Jim Montelongo, Sid Ruckriegel and Chama St. Louis. WCBU News Director Tim Shelley will moderate. It will be broadcast on WCBU 89.9 FM and simultaneously shown on Facebook. There will be no live audience because of the pandemic.

The public can submit questions for consideration via the Election 2021 - WCBU Voter Guide | Peoria Public Radio. Please consider submitting questions.

We are also surveying the candidates for Peoria's five district council positions. We will share the responses on [lwvgp.org](http://lwvgp.org) and with our partner organizations.

As a reminder, early voting and vote by mail for the Feb. 23 primary begins on Jan. 14.

———— Roberta Parks

## PLAN FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2021-22

Join me on Zoom at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 23. to create the framework for our local priorities in the coming year.

We will make recommendations on current LWVIL positions listed in the 2019-2021 edition of **Where We Stand** (Retain, Revise or Drop). A copy of this can be found on [www.lwvil.org](http://www.lwvil.org) under Issues and Advocacy, Where We Stand.

In addition, we will make recommendations for New Studies and Action Focus Items. Local studies are important in all Leagues; they can excite, challenge and launch action in local communities. Consider the following criteria:

- Is the subject a current concern in the community?
- Is it an issue in which the League could make an impact?
- Is it an issue important enough to League members to generate a commitment of time and energy?
- Is it an issue requiring governmental action? Is action even possible?

So grab a cup of coffee and join us for this conversation on the topics members' feel strongly about and help to shape our focus for the coming year!

The link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81161035608?pwd=bGthTkc5Qm-p6Wk5vWkZqRkJJQIU3UT09>. Meeting ID: 811 6103 5608. Password: 709515.

—— Connie Romanus

## MEMBERSHIP

What a year 2020 has been! Hopefully, as we move into 2021 we will see COVID-19 slowly disappear. The administration of a vaccine is a ray of hope for thousands or millions worldwide.

As we prepare for the new year, the Membership Committee will do a Zoom call in mid-January to plan for the Membership Drive in 2021-22. Every member should be involved in the recruitment and retention of members. It is our hope that in this new year we will be able to make person-to-person contacts with potential members. Most recruitment for organizations is based on relationships and each of you has relationships on which we can build.

Our new year actually begins July 1, 2021 – that means current members should renew prior to that time. So – be watching for a plan to increase membership by at least 10%. In 2020, we did 11% without actually meeting people.

We hope that you had a wonderful holiday season and have escaped the flu and the virus.

**Happy New Year**

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## **PEORIA CITY COUNCIL: Dec. 8**

Items of interest from the meeting:

Approved a 10 % fee cap for third-party food delivery services. This is in response to restaurants having limited dining or no dining and relying on third party delivery services for take-out food. These delivery services charged as much as 30% of the purchase price, which many restaurant owners felt was unsustainable.

Approved resolutions to place two public questions on the April ballot — a referendum creating a Firefighters' Pension Tax and separate referendum creating a Police Pension Tax. These are Advisory Referendums.

Responding to a question regarding the city's enforcement of the governor's mitigation orders regarding COVID-19: City Manager Patrick Urich said the city receives complaints through the "Restore HOI" website. Restaurant-related complaints are shared with the public health department. The police department and community development office visit the establishment, document the issue, and file the matter with the state's attorney's office. Urich said the city has not discussed revoking city liquor licenses and is trying to ensure compliance instead.

Voted to abate the tax previously levied to pay principal and interest on certain general obligation corporate bonds and partial abatement on other specific bonds totaling \$19,755,875.

Accepted a \$516,000 Strategies in Policing Innovations grant and purchased a list of public safety equipment including Street Smart software.

Deferred to Jan. 12 the possible purchase of 210 S. Western (a former grocery store) using South Village TIF funds for \$550,000. Disagreement included: the city shouldn't purchase property to enable a private grocery to come into the space; there are several community centers in that area already; discussion in that community had always been about a community center. A 3/5 vote is needed to amend the budget and purchase this property.

Council voted to use Eagle View TIF money to take action as an emergency demolition of particular properties near Harrison School.

Regarding Councilman John Kelly's Urban Decay Tax Abatement Area proposal, state statute requires a Joint Review Board to review the proposed ordinance and offer comments. Kelly said a Joint Review Board held two meetings and voted to approve the tax abatement plan with Peoria Public Schools abstaining, noting the school district wanted advice and consent from the school board. Action taken was to receive and file the Joint Review Board's recommendation, noting approval still had to come back at a minimum of 45 days to remove the property from the existing TIF with an Ordinance to establish the Urban Decay Area. This is controversial with District 1 councilperson saying it would lead to gentrification.

The Dec. 22 meeting was cancelled.

—— Cheryl Budzinski



## **PEORIA CITY COUNCIL: Dec. 15**

Special Meeting at noon Dec. 15 to approve a consent decree between the City, Greater Peoria Sanitary District, US EPA and Illinois EPA regarding the Combined Sewer Overflow issue. This \$110,000,000 solution takes 18 years.

The key terms for the city include:

- o Civil penalty of \$100,000.
- o 18-year timeline for construction of improvements.
- o Reliance on green infrastructure to reduce individual discharges and volume reductions.
- o Additional modeling/reporting to EPA and IEPA for rainfall/storm flows.
- o Public participation in the creation of a CSO Remedial Measures Program.

This is a performance-based consent decree. There are still fines for noncompliance outside the agreed compliance levels. In the 1980s the combined sewerage overflow was about 640,000,000 gallons of sewage annually going into the Illinois River. Changes already made have overflow at 180,000,000 gallons per year. Ultimately the goal is maximum of 16,300,000 gallons per year.

Greater Peoria Sanitary District's penalty is \$75,000, which is also from your pocketbook.

An additional requirement of the IEPA called a Supplemental Environmental Project is doing work on Turkey Creek in Springdale Cemetery (owned by the City) primarily to improve the water quality and reduce the continued degradation of existing waterways and lower sedimentation to the Illinois River – a \$200,000 stream restoration project.

To see the four-page presentation on the CSO decree, go to: [http://www.peoriagov.org/content/uploads/2020/12/CSO-Fact-Sheet-12-9-2020\\_1607623358\\_add.pdf](http://www.peoriagov.org/content/uploads/2020/12/CSO-Fact-Sheet-12-9-2020_1607623358_add.pdf)

—— Cheryl Budzinski

## **PEORIA HOUSING AUTHORITY: Dec. 9**

The Dec. 9, 2020 PHA Board of Commissioners meeting was called to order at 4:44 p.m. Chairman Carl Cannon presided; all commissioners were present.

The Rev. Marvin Hightower, president of local NAACP, spoke during Community Comments. He urged the PHA staff and board to advocate that the Section 3 code be followed closely for success, sustainability and benefit of the African American community in regards to the upcoming Taft Housing project. Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act of 1968 provides employment and other economic opportunities generated by certain HUD projects be directed to public housing residents, individuals of low to very low income and businesses that

provide economy to these persons. (More on this in CEO report).

Minutes of the Oct. 5, 2020 and Nov. 9, 2020 board meeting minutes were approved. Jackie Newman, PHA CEO, reported that the PHA offices at all locations have scaled back in-person contact with residents due to Illinois Department of Public Health COVID-19 guidelines, including non-emergency repairs of properties. Emergency needs are being addressed.

Ms. Newman discussed HUD Section 3 regulations in regards to the Taft Housing project. PHA is collaborating with Illinois Central College and local trade unions for job training. PHA has sent out letters to inform residents of the opportunities, as well as a survey, regarding educational and job training. A memorandum of understanding will provide pre-employment education and training of PHA residents with referrals from PHA for work on the Taft project. A stipend may be available to individuals of \$10 an hour while training; this stipend would be excluded from income calculation for PHA rent. It is anticipated that two cohorts of individuals will be trained by late spring, prior to the Taft demolition.

The following resolutions were approved: renewal of PHA employee BC/BS health contract, with approval of ASCME and unions (less than 1% increase in cost); write off tenant account receivable that has been determined un-collectable (\$21,176) and that some of the amount may be recoverable at year end; replacement of roofing at scattered site housing; submission of fiscal year 2020 Public Housing Budget; submission of Mainstream Voucher program to HUD; submitted HCV Letter for annual declaration of standards; contract for issues addressing bed bug infestation; contract for pest control; contract for cleaning of administrative offices with new minority-owned company. Chairman Cannon inquired if new company would be open to hiring PHA residents for jobs, response from PHA staff was positive.

General Counsel annual review of 2020 meetings regarding Open Meetings Act was completed. Prior six months minutes have been reviewed previously and recommendation is to destroy documents more than 18 months old as these have been released. Regarding closed session minutes, recommendation is not to release minutes as most of them have to do with litigation, some of which is on-going. These will not be released to public.

Board adjourned at 5:54 p.m. for brief closed session related to 5 ILCS 120/2 c (11) – litigation. Closed session anticipated to last five minutes.

—— Connie Romanus, Observer

## **PEORIA COUNTY ELECTION COMMISSION, Dec. 8**

Peoria County Election Commission met Dec. 8, 2020, at the Peoria County Courthouse, with all members present.

In discussing expenditures, Director Tom Bride said there is plenty of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) left over for the spring elections. Ballot Trax is paid by the sign-in; 10,300 voters signed up for it, with 32,000 sign-ins.

The bill from Verizon from last month that was too high is still being worked on. Recoding for hotspots needs to be completed. Of the \$224,658 CARES Act, all but \$21,000 has been paid out, and that amount has been spoken for. Of the \$85,7575 allowed by the Postage Grant, \$62,000 goes back to the County IT department to pay for mailing applications and ballots. The Center for Tech & Civic Life Grant has been used to pay for Ballot Trax, flags and stickers, training and related videos, some phone expenses, toner, and a shredder. The \$109,544 can now be used through July. Director Bride wants to give hazard pay: \$1,500 to full time employees, \$500 to part-time employees, and \$100 to judges. That will leave \$21,000 to be used in the spring elections.

Breakdown of the Nov. 3 election: 72.56% total turnout with 35% vote by mail, 31% early voting, and 34% voting on election day. The total number of voters was just under 85,000.

For the Feb. 23 primary, the list of primary candidates should now be on the website, early and by-mail voting begins on January 14. Filing for school boards will be between December 14 and 21. Some problems with on-line requests for primary ballots are being worked on. The office plans on using Ballot Trax again.

The Election Commission office is working with reduced staff. Two full- and one part-time staffer work remotely. The only employees working in the building are Director Bride, his assistant in the office and a worker in the warehouse.

Later that afternoon the commission was to hear challenges to petitions to two mayoral candidates, which had to be held in the courthouse. (Both challenges were upheld, and both candidates have said they will run as write-ins.)

—— Irene Pritzker, Observer

## **FIND OUT WHAT IS NEW WITH 1 Mississippi**

There is a new episode of the May The River Be With You Podcast! You can listen any time, wherever you get podcasts. Mark River is at it again with the latest release - Flooding and Climate Change. In this episode, Mark River interviews

John Ruskey, who shares how climate change is affecting the flowing, ecology, and commerce along the Mississippi River. [Listen here](#) or wherever you get podcasts.

1 Mississippi is brought to you by the Mississippi River Network (MRN). MRN is a coalition of 58 organizations dedicated to protecting the well-being of the land, water, wildlife and people of America's greatest river, the Mississippi. Direct questions or comments to [info@1mississippi.org](mailto:info@1mississippi.org)

LWVGP is a member of the Upper Mississippi River Region Interstate League Organization.

—— Connie Romanus



### **CLEAN ENERGY UPDATES**

The Clean Energy Jobs Act/ CEJA website has been updated with some very significant worker justice and equity provisions and there have been some updates in the legislation. It may come up in the state's lame duck session in January, since the veto session in November was cancelled.

Here is the updated info link: [About the Clean Energy Jobs Act](#).

—— Joyce Blumenshine





**League of Women Voters  
of Greater Peoria**

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

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

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