

President's Message

Check out our maps

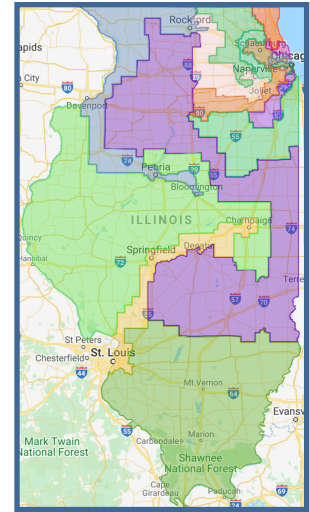
My first thought for a topic this month was the work of our Voter Services Committee, but there is another issue that is more time critical: the proposed Illinois Congressional districts.

On Oct. 14, I attended a meeting at the Peoria Public Library. The purpose of the meeting was to gather public input on new Congressional maps following the 2020 U.S. census. Gathering public input is a good thing, specifically supported by our state organization, the LWVIL. The problem was that there was no map on which to give input. When I asked the State Representatives present about a map, they explained that they also had not yet seen a map. I was more than a little surprised.

In my view, there are two critical aspects of Congressional redistricting, the process and the end result. On process the official position of the LWV includes the following:

“Illinois must adopt a redistricting process that is more accessible, equitable, and transparent and accountable to the people. Responsibility for redistricting should be vested in an independent special commission. Additionally, LWVIL supports redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote fair and effective representation at all levels of government with maximum opportunity for public participation.”

LWVGP members can decide for themselves if the process of creating new Congressional maps meets our standards. They can also decide if the end result map is intended to allow voters to select their representatives or intended to allow representatives to select their voters programs. Pour a glass of your favorite beverage and log in. Let's participate as best we can, until we're able to enjoy the camaraderie of meeting face to face.



——— Terry Kohlbuss, LWVGP president

MEET YOUR BOARD MEMBERS



Jan Deissler has been a League member for many years, serving in a number of capacities: secretary, fundraising and event planning, Drinks & Dialogue and now Membership Chair.

She brings to the League a long list of community involvement and volunteerism.

Jan taught at Illinois Central College for 40 years. In 11 of those years she served as Director of ICC Child Care Connection – a program which helps parents find child care, administers the Child Care Assistance Program, provides educational experiences for early childhood teachers and other staff and advocates for high quality programs for our youngest citizens.

Retiring from the college in 2010, she has devoted herself to the South-West Kiwanis Club of Peoria, her church, the early childhood association and the League of Women Voters.

Jan was the first instructor in the early childhood program at ICC, helping to develop the first child care center at a community college in downstate Illinois. She founded the Heart of Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children. She received the WEEK 25 Women in Leadership Award, the Women in Management Charlotte Danstrom Award and the Woman of Achievement Award. She also was on the cover of Peoria Woman magazine.

Jan served 10 years on the Peoria School District 150 Board of Education, and was elected President two different times.

She is married to Emil and they have three daughters, nine grown grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Important Dates (all ZOOM):

- 4 p.m. Mon., Nov. 8: LWVGP executive board.
- 5:30 p.m. Wed., Nov. 17: Drinks & Dialogue, “Evolving Political Landscape.”
- 10 a.m.-12 noon Tues., Nov. 16: How to Coordinate a Candidate Forum, LWVIL training.
- 10 a.m.-12 noon, Sat. Nov. 13: How to Coordinate a Candidate Forum, LWVIL training.
- 7-9 p.m. Mon., Nov. 15: LWVIL Forum Moderator LWVIL training
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DRINKS & DIALOGUE

Our series of discussions around “Making Democracy Work” continues on November 17 when we’ll be joined by Dr Emily Schnurr, Political Science Professor at Bradley University.

Dr. Schnurr teaches classes in American Government and Women in Politics, and has special interest in how campaigns are conducted. We’ll look forward to discussing questions such as:

- o How have the demographics of political parties changed?
- o What does true representation mean to democracy?
- o How can we encourage a more representative government?
- o How have voter demographics changed over time, and in what ways might they continue to change?
- o What is the impact of more women vying for and winning elections?

Please bring your questions and plan for an interactive exchange of ideas and new insights!

———— Katie Kelly, D&D chair

MEMBERSHIP

What a great fall! The farmers were able to harvest most of their crops and then the rains began. It would be nice to have a few dry days – perhaps by the time you read this.

October 1 was drop day for those who have not renewed membership for the 2021-22 year. It is not too late to send dues as directed on the website. Thanks to those of you who have paid and we hope others will send renewals soon. We are phoning those who have not renewed. So if you are reading this and you have not renewed, do so to avoid that irritating call and message.

Current membership is 111. Our actual goal was a 10% increase from 2020-21. We still need about 30 members to make that happen. Look around you, talk about the League and its mission and invite a friend to be a member. It would

be more effective if we had a ‘real’ meeting rather than a ‘virtual’ one, but for now we continue to be Zooming.

Many of you know that Membership Committee Co-Chair Linda Millen passed away on Oct. 4. She will be sorely missed for her positive attitude, her perseverance and her great sense of humor. Our sympathy to Gary Millen and family.

Jan Deissler – 635-1872

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VOTER SERVICES

Many thanks to all of you who completed the Voter Services committee survey in October. I hope to be able to report the results to the Board at our November meeting and on to all of you in December.

I want to be sure that you are all aware that the League of Women Voters of Illinois is providing several important trainings in the coming days. We need LWVGP members who have this training!

The first is How to Coordinate a Candidate Forum. This will be offered from 10 a.m. to noon, Tues., Nov. 9 and Sat., Nov. 13. The League is considered the expert in presenting non-partisan, informative candidate forums. Learn the steps to planning a successful candidate forum. This training will be conducted in two parts, with time at the end for a session on Zoom forum essentials.

The second option is Moderator Training for a Candidate Forum. This will be offered from 7 to 9 p.m. Monday, Nov. 15 and 10 a.m. to noon Tues., Nov. 16. Well-moderated candidate forums are a League hallmark — thanks to well-trained moderators! Learn how to facilitate a fair, informative, respectful, inclusive forum.

Registration for these events is required. Go to <https://www.lwvil.org/events-calendar>. The event link will be sent one day in advance. If you have questions about either training session, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at robertam-parks7513@gmail.com.

—— Roberta Parks, Chair

PEORIA CITY COUNCIL, Sept. 28

On Sept. 28, the Peoria City Council approved 14 items on the consent agenda, with one pulled for discussion related to lobbying expense for city.

Councilor John Kelly asked for clarification of expense for two lobbyists in Springfield. City Manager Patrick Urich reported that with the amount of state and federal funding anticipated, each lobbyist has expertise that would benefit city. Contract with Turning Strategies approved in amount \$3,680 per month.

Follow up from the city manager and Community Development Director Joe Dulin on elimination of various business licenses/regulations in city identified 17 items that are no longer pertinent. An additional 17-18 more items are anticipated to be identified. Manager Urich complimented Dulin and city staff for their work on this, as well as Councilman Denis Cyr for his identification of this problem for small business owners. Urich also reported that \$1.4 million from Department of Commerce was distributed to more than 100 local businesses, in addition to \$1.3 million DEA funds.

Representatives of Downtown Advisory Committee (DAC) made presentation to Council with recommendations on restoration of two-way streets in downtown area to increase economic development, pedestrian safety and compliance with sewer overflow plan. Riverfront Master Plan 2020 identified to resolve flooding, parking issues, ensuring green space and coordination with Peoria Park District, as well as coordination with Main Street redevelopment efforts. Way-finding pilot with signage to help visitors get around easily last item covered in presentation. Funding efforts to include federal funds, grants, and public-private partnerships. Councilor Beth Jensen asked that public meetings be advertised so community engagement and input can occur.

Dulin presented 2020 census data to Council, including the potential impact on current council districts. Census results reported population in city as 113,150 residents, a decrease of 1.6% from 2010. Anticipated changes to proportion districts equally: expand District 1 by 3,938; District 2 expand by 1,555; District 3 expand by 1,115; Districts 4 and 5 would see decreases in population.

Mayor Rita Ali will appoint Redistricting Committee to meet to begin to address the proportioning of district boundaries based on census results. This process will begin after budget sessions completed with goal to conclude by March 2022. Director Dulin stated that the city has access to software to run scenarios for proportioning districts. Councilor Sid Ruckriegel was recognized for his work in leading the census efforts; he, in turn, recognized the efforts of many community partners for their work to get more complete data.

——— Connie Romanus, Observer

PEORIA CITY COUNCIL: Oct. 12

A quorum was present for the regular bi-weekly meeting of the City Council. Consent agenda of 10 items was unanimously approved. Special Council meetings will be held Nov. 7 and 16 regarding the proposed 2022-2023 Biennial Budget, as well as other business.

The council voted unanimously to focus on redistricting based on census. Prior to the vote, there was some discussion regarding altering current structure of five districts with five at large positions to ten districts. Attorney Phillip Lenzini presented an overview of the 1987 class action lawsuit representing Peoria Park District and Peoria School Board and City of Peoria for lack of equal representation in local elections. The outcome of this consent decree that has no expiration date. The result of this legal action was the cumulative five-vote for at-large council positions, as well as school and park board positions.

The Council voted to approve two special use Class 4 (single family residence) short term rentals in District 2, with one councilor voting no. Concerns were expressed on maintaining quality of life in heritage neighborhoods, parking, number of persons allowed, and potential disruptive behavior with short term rentals. Guidelines on the number of short-term rentals in a district, as well as how close special use permits would be allowed in specific radius were issues discussed. Council deferred action on a third special use permit to the next regularly scheduled council meeting to allow additional information to be provided.

City Manager Patrick Urich reported that general fund balance was in stronger position than anticipated due to \$10.8 million in income tax revenues, state shared funds, and internet sales tax. Original projection was \$1.2 million. The proposed capital budget is \$34 million with focus on replenishing staff positions that had been eliminated including Public Works, Code Enforcement and Fire Department. Filling Police Department vacancies is also a priority, as well as 30 recruits scheduled for Police Academy.

—— Connie Romanus, Observer

SPECIAL: EDWARDS COAL ASH POND

Representatives for Illinois Power Resources Generating, LLC, a Vistra Energy LLC subsidiary, held a public presentation about the Edwards coal plant ash pond at the Pere Marquette Hotel on Oct. 13.

Notice of the session appeared in an ad in the Peoria Journal Star on Oct. 7.

The session was one of the requirements in a legal settlement over groundwater contamination at Edwards and several other downstate coal plants in the case *Sierra Club v. Illinois Power Generating Company, et al*, Illinois Pollution Control Board case PCB 2019-078.

The meeting was moderated by a Vistra staff member from Texas. A panel of three specialists with the company discussed aspects of their work regarding the Edwards coal ash pond, including site investigations ongoing to meet existing state

regulations for ash pond closures; data collection and monitoring well results; what could be a surface impoundment closure timeline; and additional measures the company will be taking to evaluate the site for closure.

Public comments included statements on the need for the coal ash to be removed from bottomland and safe handling and placement of the ash in an approved and monitored landfill. Some commentators stated doubts about the history of company compliance with regulations. There were questions on the company commitment to local concerns, including coal plant impacts of decades of polluted air impacting the south side of Peoria and minority neighborhoods.

Thirty-six people were in the audience area, including the Chairman and members of the Peoria Park Board, the President of Illinois People's Action Rev. Tony Pierce, Peoria City Councillor Denise Jackson, Peoria League of Women Voters, and a variety of faith-based, environmental, and justice group members.

Coal ash is the waste material left after coal is burned. It contains arsenic, boron, mercury and other contaminants, many of them toxic to people, fish and wildlife. When coal ash comes into contact with water, these hazardous materials leach out of the waste and can pollute both surface water and groundwater. Several of the substances can cause cancer, damage the nervous system and other organs, or cause other major health issues. Throughout its 52 years of operations, the Edwards plant has dumped large amounts of coal ash close to the Illinois River and coal ash has been used for fill and other site projects including the access road embankment.

Some sources indicate the bottom ten feet of the existing ash pond is in contact with groundwater. The coal ash pond is an 89-acre, 32-foot-deep incised pond with embankment and is located between the plant and access road off of Illinois Route 24 south of Bartonville. The area around the plant has been declared unusable for potable, drinkable water due to existing pollution according to the Illinois EPA permit for plant discharges.

More meetings will be held in the future regarding the closure of the Edwards power plant at the end of December, 2022.

——— Joyce Blumenshine, Observer

PEORIA COUNTY BOARD, Oct. 14

The Peoria County Board held its regular monthly meeting Oct. 14 with all members present except Chairman Andrew Rand. Member Linda Daley participated via phone.

Two proclamations recognizing Bartonville Hardware's 70th anniversary and the Heart of Illinois United Way's 100th anniversary were read.

Twelve citizens offered remarks related to the proposed 2022 budget's staffing and appropriation reductions in the County Auditor's office. Among those speaking were Jessica Thomas, County Auditor, and the three employees impacted by those reductions. State's Attorney Jodi Hoos also spoke later in the meeting responding to some statements made during public comment.

The 17 consent agenda items were approved on a 16-1 vote without discussion. Among those items were acceptance of five grants, approval of additional funds for the Distillery Labs Smart City/Mobility Living Laboratory, and approval of four infrastructure projects in western Peoria County.

Other regular business included approval of a Long Term Care Ombudsman/Senior Advocate position in conjunction with the Center for Prevention of Abuse, and discussion and approval of ten resolutions related to the 2022 budget.

Highlights include:

- o Adoption of the annual tax levy — there is no increase in this rate.
- o Approval of a budget amendment to permit use of ARPA (America Rescue Plan Act) funds to cover the increases in health care premiums for county employees with one or more dependents.
- o Approval of a budget amendment setting aside \$87,000 from the General Fund to ensure the three Auditor's office employees could laterally transfer to other county positions in 2022.
- o Adoption of the 2022 Peoria County Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance as amended by the previous two bulleted items on a 15-2 vote.
- o With the adoption of the 2022 amended Budget the Auditor's office staffing was eliminated with only the elected Auditor serving in that office for the upcoming year.

A proclamation was approved on a 13-4 vote extending the Declaration of Emergency due to COVID-19 in Peoria County.

———— Jim Runyon, Observer

PEORIA HOUSING AUTHORITY, Oct. 4

A quorum was present at the monthly meeting of PHA Board of Commissioners. Two topics for community concern included one resident with issue of mistaken identity affecting her status with PHA and Rhonda Sexton, union bargaining representative, regarding employee contract issues related to Taft redevelopment.

Two residents of PHA completed Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program that enables them to increase their income and reduce reliance on welfare and rental assistance. Both are in process of purchasing a home for their family.

Jackie Newman, Executive Director of PHA, gave overview of Taft redevelopment project status. The new housing development will be named Provident Pointe, with ground breaking scheduled on Oct. 6.

Reports to Board were approved by consent agenda. A resolution was approved revising the Administrative and Occupant Plan which will change eligibility to allow persons without crime record in past six months to apply for housing, as well as maintaining records of denial for review by state Criminal Justice Board.

————— Connie Romanus, Observer



League of Women Voters
of Greater Peoria

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ON THE WEB: www.lwvvp.org

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Newsletter

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