

President's Message

## Finally, we can spring forward

With the lifting of mask mandates, it looks like in-person meetings are not far off. I certainly look forward to more normal times. Thinking back over the last two years, I am still astonished at how our organization coped with COVID restrictions. Under the leadership of past President Connie Romanus, we grew our membership, strengthened our finances and maintained our core activities and mission.

Now we are positioned to be even more effective. In January, we held our Annual Program Planning meeting. Two new initiatives emerged. Janet Roth requested a new study on the need for Township government. She has agreed to chair the effort and has already recruited several volunteers.

John Brady proposed that the LWVGP take a more active role in promoting climate change initiatives in local government. At our Board of Directors meeting on March 14, we will discuss specific activities and details.

Even as we take on these new programs, we will be ramping up on Candidate Forums, Drinks & Dialogue and recommendations from our new Communications Committee to improve our messaging internally and externally. We can also look forward to our Annual Dinner meeting as soon as possible.

I am convinced organizations like ours are increasingly important. Public bodies have been meeting with less accountability than usual due to COVID and changes in the local media coverage. Our Observer corps has played a valuable role in monitoring local government, but we need to do more.

All of this points to a need to continue growing our membership. So, I am asking that each of you take a few minutes to reach out to and recruit potential new members. We have plenty of work to do. All of it will have more impact if we speak for a growing membership.

Spring is a time of renewal and growth. Let's do that!!

——— Terry Kohlbuss, LWVGP president

## Important Dates (all ZOOM):

4 p.m. Mon., March 13: LWVGP Executive Board.

5:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 15: Drinks & Dialogue, topic TBA.

## MEET YOUR BOARD MEMBERS



### **Katie Kelly**

Kathleen (Katie) Kelly has been a Board Member for just over two years, and served as Chair of the Drinks & Dialogue Committee until transitioning to chair the new Communications Committee. Katie is passionate about public policy, and was drawn to the League as a place to have dynamic political discussions framed by the organization's researched positions.

Katie has a B.A. from Saint Louis University and a master's degree in Public Administration from Rutgers University. She has lived in three Spanish-speaking countries and five states so far.

Katie grew up in Peoria and has deep ties to the community from her work as an AmeriCorps VISTA at Prairie State Legal Services and her time as a civilian analyst at the Peoria Police Department. Her professional expertise is in the coordination of cross-sector prevention policy and programming (education, public health, criminal Justice).

In 2019, Katie returned to Peoria from AZ to launch a social impact startup with her brother to help schools support children impacted by traumatic events in their homes or communities. She lives with her husband and two dogs.

## MEMBERSHIP

Hopefully, by the time you read this, we will be having more spring-like weather and we will have the choice of mask or no mask nearly everywhere. Life is slowly returning to normal – or a new normal. Continue to be safe as you move about the community and elsewhere.

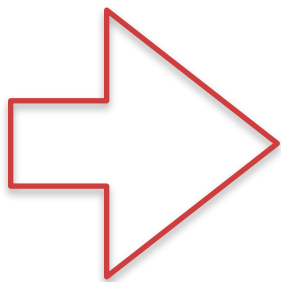
Membership today is 132 members: 2 life members, 2 student/scholarship members; 26 additional in-household members and 102 primary members. We have reached last year's level of membership, but we continue to hope that we can reach yet a higher number. Our target was 10% increase, so continue to invite your family, friends, colleagues and people you meet to join. June 30th is the end of our fiscal year which gives us four months to achieve the goal of 145 members.


This being an election year, our role in providing information to the public is a vital part of the voting process. The League needs you to volunteer to help with disseminating information to the public. The Membership Committee needs your help in the recruitment at League activities and events during the coming months. Step up, recruit and volunteer.

Please contact the committee if you have ideas or suggestions on how we can grow our membership. Remember Democracy is not a Spectator Sport!

**Jan Deissler – 635-1872**

**[jandeissler77@gmail.com](mailto:jandeissler77@gmail.com)**






# VOTE


[IllinoisVoterGuide.org](http://IllinoisVoterGuide.org)

**Tuesday, June 28**  
**Illinois General Primary Election Day**

March 30	First day to apply for a vote by mail ballot.
May 19	First day to vote early at the office of the election authority. First day for the election authority to mail an official ballot to a registered voter within the United States.
June 1-28	Grace period registration and voting at election authority and polling sites.
June 12	Last day for online voter registration. Grace period registration is available at election authority and early voting sites.
June 13	First day to vote early at permanent polling places. (Vote early at the office of the election authority starting May 19.)
June 23	Last day for election authority to receive vote by mail applications.
June 28	<b>General Primary Election Day!</b> Polls open from 6:00 am to 7:00 pm.



Non-partisan voter information  
Powered by the League of Women Voters of Illinois  
Activated by YOU



## **PEORIA CITY COUNCIL: Jan. 25**

The Jan. 25 Council meeting began with a public hearing regarding creation of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, to be known as University/War TIF. There were no public comments, after three calls by Mayor Rita Ali and the hearing closed with no discussion.

Consent agenda approved by Council members.

The main topic of business was an update to the Council and public on status of passenger rail initiative (train speeds of 80-100 miles per hour), a priority of Mayor Ali. She has been in discussion on high-speed rail with former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood over the past six months. A committee has been formed with Councilor Sid Ruckriegel and other local stakeholders, including state representatives, IDOT Secretary Omer Osman, Peoria County Board Chair Andrew Rand, labor and business leaders and Bradley University.

City Manager Patrick Urich provided an overview of Committee, rationale for passenger rail system, IDOT Feasibility Study (to be completed in April) and available funding through Tri-County Regional Planning Commission. A survey has been launched to get community input about the Passenger Rail Initiative.

The Council unanimously approved revisions to City Façade Improvement Program, which will be expanded to all businesses in Peoria with funds from American Rescue Plan. Senior Economic Specialist Kevin Evans shared that proposed changes would expand eligibility for program, increase fund limit and reimbursement amount for distressed areas. The city manager will have administrative authority for this program.

—— Connie Romanus, Observer

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

A short public meeting regarding redistricting of council districts was held prior to council meeting. Comments were made in person and written communication by seven citizens, most representing home-owners' associations from the West Bluff and Moss-Bradley areas. All were against the proposed changes in V2.3 map based on lack of transparency, as well as community input, and not keeping existing neighborhoods intact. The Council plans final vote on redistricting at Feb. 22 meeting. (Proposed council district maps are available [www.peoriagov.org/redistricting](http://www.peoriagov.org/redistricting).)

Annual Township meeting of City of Peoria will be held at 6 p.m. April 12 in council chambers. Citizens wishing to speak must submit specific items to be considered for meeting agenda by Tuesday, March 1, 2022 to Township Clerk ; communication must be signed by 15 citizens.

Council approved issuance of general obligation bonds not to exceed \$17 million for financing certain capital improvements and refunding certain outstanding bonds to provide for levy and collection of direct annual tax for payment of principal and interest and authorizing sale of the bonds. Vote preceded by robust discussion by members; final vote 8-3. Councilors Denis Cyr, John Kelly and Sid Ruckriegel voted against the bonds.

City Manager Patrick Urich provided overview of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) process and benefits for the University/War Memorial redevelopment project. Benefits include additional improvements, as well as tax revenue from new businesses. When asked about public input on this project, Urich cited a Jan. 25 public hearing, as well as presentation to local taxing bodies given at Open Meeting where comment was available. The TIF would expire in 23 years.

Meetings are heldt 6 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month. They can be viewed online or cable public access Channel 22. Agenda and minutes available at [www.peoriagov.org/city-council/council-meetings](http://www.peoriagov.org/city-council/council-meetings).

—— Connie Romanus, Observer

## **PEORIA COUNTY BOARD: Feb. 8**

Peoria County Board met Feb. 8 with all present but Member Brandy Bryant. Members Rachel Reliford, Brian Elsasser and Paul Rosenbohm participated by phone.

There were no Citizen's Remarks.

The Consent agenda passed on a vote of 16-0 without discussion. Among items approved were:

- o A Local Agency Agreement for Federal Participation with the State of Illinois for reconstruction of Peoria County's section of Glen Avenue from Sheridan Road to Knoxville Avenue.

- o Grant dollars to fund microchips for animals at PCAPS.

The regular agenda consisted of four items and all were approved. These include:

- o Special use to allow a land split in Limestone Township in order to separate and sell two existing buildings from the remaining agricultural use.

- o Amendments to Special Use Permits within the Peoria County Code to proactively address the application process for any future wind tower/turbines within the county. Included were provisions related to emergency signage, noise level certification, liability insurance, adding bats to the required avian study, and ensuring decommission plans and funding are in place prior to approval. No applications have been received to date. These amendments follow approval during

the January meeting of temporary meteorological towers to record and measure wind data for up to three years in Millbrook, Princeville and Brimfield townships.

o Suspension of the Rules to permit extension of the Declaration of Emergency due to COVID-19 in the county.

You can link to the agenda and video here: [Agenda & Video](#)

———— Jim Runyon, Observer

## **ELECTION COMMISSION: Feb. 8**

Peoria County Board of Election Commissioners met Feb. 8, with a quorum of three. Commissioners Matt Bartolo and Mark Ketterer were absent.

In his monthly report, Director Tom Bride said that there would be a kickoff meeting for the new voting system the following day. A calendar will be determined through the primary in June. On Feb. 15, he and Elizabeth Gannon planned to go to DeKalb County to observe a mock election on the Hart equipment, which is the same equipment Peoria County will be getting. DuPage and Peoria Counties are the only voting entities in Illinois doing ballot on demand.

New voter registration cards will be sent out. They cannot be forwarded and are sent back to the Voting Commission as undeliverable if the person doesn't live at that address anymore. Those voters whose cards were "undeliverable" are then sent a letter that can be forwarded, telling the voter that they need to change their voting address.

Peoria has been visited by cybersecurity personnel from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. They evaluated the local election office and made a few recommendations, mostly having to do with documentation. They gave an active shooter seminar, but found no necessary changes.

———— Irene Pritzker, Observer

## **PEORIA HOUSING AUTHORITY: Feb. 7**

The Peoria Housing Authority Board of Commissioners met for regular monthly meeting electronically due to COVID-19 pandemic. There were no public comments or FSS graduates. Human Resources announced one new employee this month and anticipate another in next few weeks.

Minutes of special meetings of Jan. 6 and 7, 2022, were approved, as well as the Annual and Regular meetings of Jan. 10, 2022. Consent agenda approved without discussion. The Chief Executive Officer's report was brief. Ms. Jackie Newman's written report was distributed to Commissioners but was not available on website or at meeting. HUD scores for 2021 in progress; scores carried over

from prior year and will be resolved in January – February 2023. She will report on upcoming changes in housing programs in March.

With no old or new business items to bring forward, or board comments, the Commissioners went into closed session for employee compensation issue at 4:45 p.m. There was no update from CEO Search Committee. Next meeting is 4:30 p.m. March 7.

————— Connie Romanus, Observer

### **SPRINGDALE CEMETERY MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY: Feb. 15**

Meeting was chaired by Pam Johnson, with two members participating by phone and six participating in person.

New representative from Peoria County is Henry Blackwell (joining County Board Members Linda Daley and Kate Pastucha.) Joyce Harant represents the Peoria Park District and is fairly new to this board also. This Observer was the only member of the public in attendance. The wifi in the Volunteer and Maintenance Building where the meeting is held is not good, so it would be difficult to hold the meeting virtually.

Manager Mark Matuszak's report included:

- o Burials for January 2022 were more than done for eight years
  - o A revised Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) in its seventh version is being discussed at the city, county, and park district - the original IGA signers. Joyce Harant asked when/whether there would be a public meeting to discuss the IGA. Response was that the three originating signers should accept public comment prior to their approving the IGA document. (The original IGA identified the City as the owner with the Park District and County "participating" with an identified amount of money each year. The owner would make up any deficit or accept profits. Typically the city pays about \$250,000 per year, while the county and the park district's agreed annual amount is much less than that. Note: anyone living within the city helps to pay all three of those amounts.)
  - o Board member Jim Stuttle questioned whether "allowing the endowment fund" was included in the IGA as discussed at a previous meeting. (Cemeteries have that fund to pay for ongoing upkeep of the cemetery since the business will eventually run out of plots to sell. Springdale is large and the sale of plots cannot cover annual costs.) The manager will get that change added to the IGA.
- After a market assessment, staff will recommend increasing opening and closing fees as well as site costs (plots.)
- o Employee wage increases were discussed, as was: the fact that several wonderful long-term volunteers can no longer do physical work, which may require more employees; the pandemic labor shortage required increased pay to get the sea-

sonal work done; and adding a Bradley University intern part time to document the Cloudpoint process in identifying grave locations for future volunteers and staff.

- o They will add 24 or so replacement trees (and troughs and netting) this Spring. Discussed that is a good item for people to donate money towards. Also replacing old trash receptacles and signs that are tattered.

- o Lighting for the Civil War Monument is backordered, but the electrical work for that is complete.

- o Memorial Day event will include “Race for Preservation” sponsored by the Springdale Historic Preservation Foundation, drive throughs with veteran gravesites locations; and recognition of volunteers.

Kate Pastucha is the new president of the Foundation Board and they have worked on updating their committees, etc. There will be new activities at Springdale happening through the Foundation.

———— Cheryl Budzinski, Observer

## **GREATER PEORIA SANITARY DISTRICT: Feb. 15**

Trustees participated in person and online. That option was open to the public also. Staff and Trustees were welcoming to have an Observer.

Their website was very helpful finding the location, time, date, how to participate online or in person. You can also learn more about their FY '22 Strategy: Safety & Employees, Environmental Protection, and Community & Customer Expectations and their long-range strategy: “Our three main focus areas are: (1) a cleaner river (including consent decree implementation), (2) collection system rehabilitation, and (3) treatment plant rehabilitation.”

Trustee President Robert Gates presided. Executive Director Brian Johnson lead his staff to explain the monthly reports and issues including:

### **Financials**

- o Pension assets at IMRF yielded 16.2% return so the 2022 employer rate will be decreased

- o Investments and reserve show \$23 million in savings, but an outage of a turbine or other equipment can cost more than that.)

- o Costs have increased significantly with chemicals increasing 15% and utilities increasing 26%

- o Insurance costs have increased from \$36,875 to \$44,672 – GPSD insures all of its properties since an unexpected flood or other cost would be significant

- o An automation study is needed to plan for failure replacements of equipment, especially their diesel turbines which must operate even in event of power outages.

Mr. Johnson presented the proposed budget strategy which considers an aging plant and anticipated growth in North Peoria. He will work with each Trustee to answer questions, etc. Some highlights:

- o Customer rates from GPSD @ \$300/year are well below the national average, which is @ \$586/year. However they will be looking at an \$.80 per month increase in their budget for 2022-23. And, they don't have the City of Peoria's rate yet.

- o "Consent Decree" term is used referring to the CSO (Combined Sewer Overflow) determination. Almost half of their "Capitol Projects" are Consent Decree projects

- o The GPSD fiscal year starts in May.

- o A Public Hearing on the 2023 Budget is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. April 19.

Other agenda items:

- o Approved a new ordinance for grease collections since the previous company doing this stopped operating last year. It takes additional effort for GPSD to deal with this (mostly restaurant) waste stream and GPSD kept the previous operator's fees in place until they complete a cost study underway.

- o Discussed "authorized Water Shutoffs on Delinquent Accounts" at length including Low Income pledges from PCCEO, landlord/tenant issues, huge bills due to landlords not repairing plumbing

- o Only one backup last month and staff has worked with that owner.

———— Cheryl Budzinski, Observer

## **PEORIA PARK DISTRICT: Jan. 12**

The meeting was held both in person and through streaming Zoom on the Peoria ParkDistrict Facebook page. President Robert Johnson conducted the meeting via Zoom.

Director Rebecca Shulman from The Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum spoke about the fact that the Museum has had to deal with a 15-month closure due to COVID and laid out a strategic plan going forward. Priority items included the following:

- o Identify and implement strategies for helping children become explorers and creators beyond the museum building

- o Actively engage new participants through marketing partnerships and programming.

- o Clarify and leverage the role of the PlayHouse within the park district.

All agenda items were approved. Trustee Jackie Petty was appointed Vice President of the Board 2022.

Director Emily Cahill reiterated the policy of the park district agenda being posted online on the Friday before the Wednesday meeting. This is more time than the legally required 48 hours before a scheduled meeting. There was some discussion whether or not the notice could be expanded to 10 to 14 days because of future discussion of the possible amphitheater construction project in Donovan Park. No action was taken.

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 with the board going into executive session.

———— Melanie Anderson, Observer

### **PEORIA PARK DISTRICT: Jan. 19**

Peoria Park District board met on Jan. 19, both in person and through streaming Zoom on the Peoria Park District Facebook page.

President Robert Johnson called the meeting to order. All Trustees were present, either in person or on Zoom.

Superintendent of Recreational Services Scott Loftus, discussed the Play Books (the guide to summer programs) and their distribution both as hard copies and online to all the students and home schoolers in Peoria. Superintendent of Parks, Matt Freeman, reported that all projects are running on schedule. All agenda items were approved. Discussion was held about the fact that an all-out effort to recruit and train lifeguards has been unsuccessful but will continue. There is persistent dearth of lifeguard recruits across the country so this situation is not unique to Peoria. Adjournment at 7:17 p.m.

———— Melanie Anderson, Observer

### **PEORIA PARK DISTRICT: FEB. 9**

Board President Robert Johnson has been elected to the State Board of Directors for the Illinois Association of Park Districts for a two-year term. He and four PPD employees attended the IAPD Conference where he was recognized.

Shalessa Pie, Human Resources Director, gave a minority hiring report for last year. In 2021:

- o 12 of 31 new hires were non-white leading to
- o 19% — 26 of 132 full-time positions — are held by non-white workers.
- o Seasonal/part-time numbers stand at 24% with 137/569 positions held by non-white workers.
- o Currently 38% of voters identify as non-white.

Executive Director Emily Cahill reported that she is waiting to hear from the state regarding funding for the Glen Oak bandshell before further planning is undertaken.

A request for \$5 million in General Obligation Park Bonds and a lease agreement with OSF for space at the RiverPlex both passed unanimously.

A question on the new Peoria Public Schools calendar led to discussion concerning preliminary thinking about programming for breaks.

All trustees were present in person/via Zoom. The meeting was called to order at 6:45 p.m. and adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

——— Melanie Anderson, Observer



## **Make yourself heard!**

**9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, March 5**

**Daily sessions at noon and 5:30 p.m., March 7-10**

Learn how you can advocate for issues you care about! Check out the lineup for LWVIL's annual Issues Briefing. With Zoom sessions on current issues and legislation being considered in the Illinois General Assembly, there is something for everyone.

Three sessions on Saturday morning explore effective advocacy, combating election misinformation, and disruption at public events. Throughout the week, sessions at noon and 5:30 pm provide opportunities to learn about topics as diverse as culturally relevant instruction, immigration, criminal justice, the electoral college, the storage of nuclear waste, and ranked choice voting.

In keeping with LWVIL's mission to provide equitable public access to information, the entire week of programming is on Zoom and only \$25, and scholarships are available. [Register today—get briefed for 2022!](#)



League of Women Voters  
of Greater Peoria

413 W. Lawndale Ave., Peoria, IL 61604

**League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria Board of Directors  
2021-2022**

Terry Kolbuss, President  
[president@lwgp.org](mailto:president@lwgp.org)

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Kim Armstrong John Brady Jan Deissler Kirsten Hall Tim Howard Kathleen Kelly Cathy Molchin Roberta Parks Couri Thomas Jamila Wilson

**Newsletter**

Terry Bibo Knight  
[terry.bibo.freelance@gmail.com](mailto:terry.bibo.freelance@gmail.com)