

**The League of
Women Voters of
Alameda**

P. O. Box 1645
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www.lwvalameda.org

The VOTER is published by the
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The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We work to raise understanding of major policy issues and influence public policy through education. The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate. We advocate only on issues that members have studied and reached consensus on. In an era of proliferating powerful special interests, the League's advocacy in the public interest is increasingly recognized as an essential voice of democracy.



VOTER

**Promoting Political Responsibility through Informed
and Active Participation**

Volume 46, Number 7, September 2015

MAJOR EVENTS THIS MONTH

See more event calendar listings on page 3

Communications workshop: "Creating Messages That Move"

Sarah Diefendorf, LWV Oakland, facilitator
Saturday September 5, 2015 9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Student Union Bldg F, College of Alameda
555 Ralph Appezato Memorial Parkway, Alameda

This free workshop is designed to help League leaders and members tell better stories and deliver stronger messages about our voter service, advocacy, and membership efforts. Participants will learn and practice new techniques and approaches to presentations and outreach, and put those new skills into action before the workshop is over. This workshop promises to be both enlightening and fun.

Since 2001, Sarah has worked as a Grassroots Capacity Building Trainer for the League of Women Voters of the United States. She also serves as the Executive Director of the Environmental Finance Center West located at Dominican University of California and University of Maryland. In that capacity Sarah works with indigenous peoples in the western U.S to promote green business enterprises and improve long-term sustainability.

In addition, Sarah serves as a national Leadership Trainer for the Environmental Finance Center Network (a community of ten universities throughout the United States) and has provided multiple workshops for water systems personnel, elected officials, and other government representatives from small and rural communities across the country.

RSVP for the workshop to alicefried89@gmail.com

LWVA General Membership Meeting
Monday September 21, 2015 7:00 – 9:00 pm
Alameda Hospital, Conference Room A
2070 Clinton Ave., Alameda

LWVA's new co-Presidents will present their priorities in this official "launch" of the 2015-2016 program year. There is ample free parking during the evening in the hospital parking lot (on Willow). This is a great opportunity for LWVA members, guests, and members of the community to meet and hear from our co-Presidents and committee chairs about plans for the year. Be sure to attend and bring your friends. This event will be listed in the local newspapers.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Alice Fried, Co-President

League of Women Voters of Alameda

Remember the phrase, “*knowledge is power?*” In my opinion, “low-information voter” describes far too many of our citizens. And with the rise of voter suppression, the attack on women’s rights, inequality, unfair taxation, the pollution of our environment, lack of affordable housing, and the high financial cost of teaching our children, not to mention the mediocre standards a fiscally challenged educational system produces, our role as a nonpartisan policy educational organization has never been more necessary.

Consider the mission statement of the League of Women Voters. Simply, it states that the goal of the League is to empower citizens to shape better communities. Now that our country is entrenched in social and economic challenges and change, I think it is time for us to reacquaint ourselves with the League’s tenets and re-commit to encouraging informed and active participation in government. But in order for us to engage our community, we, the members and activists within the League, must be knowledgeable and engaged ourselves. That is why as co-presidents, Anne and I are passionate about informing and involving you in fulfilling the League’s promise to build citizen participation in the democratic process. Therefore, we must re-energize our efforts to provide the intelligence that encourages and empowers people to seek positive solutions to public policy issues and to engage in collective decision making.

Our first undertaking to achieve this goal is a Communications Workshop to give members and committee chairs communication skills that define our “brand” and improve the relevancy of our messaging within the community. This workshop will be held on September 5 from 9-1 in the Student Union at the College of Alameda. (See page one of this issue and on the LWVA website. lwvalameda.org) Anne and I encourage all members and committee chairs to attend. We believe that every member should have the tools required to influence public policy through education and advocacy.

The first General Meeting of our co-presidency will be held on September 21 from 7-9 in Conference Room A at Alameda Hospital. At this meeting members will not only be introduced to LWVA new leadership, to our updated communications infrastructure, but to each other. In addition, we will outline our local, state and national League goals such as organizing a community forum to contemplate a local study of the Open Primary (top-two) voting system in California; campaigning for easier registration; educating local citizens on the upcoming Prop.13 “Make It Fair” ballot initiative; and participating in the national, state and local initiatives relating to money in politics and the effects of the Citizens United decision. Come, share your ideas and discover how you can help. Bring a friend.

Anne and I believe that if LWVA is to achieve the mission of the League, every member has to be informed in order to be an active player. It is our hope that you attend the General Meeting on September 21 as well as the Communications Workshop on September 5, and join us in empowering each other as well as our community with the knowledge needed to keep our democracy working as Alameda and communities across the nation seek a path to a better future.

Thank you, and I look forward to sharing information and working with each of you to make a powerful impact on shaping our town—our country—for the common good.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Fri. Sept. 4th**
5:30 PM
First Friday no-host social dinner: Everyone is welcome! Join us at [McGee's Bar & Grill, 1645 Park Street @ Buena Vista](#)
Reserve by noon Fri. connie.hanna@comcast.net
- Sat. Sept. 5th**
1:00 PM
Communications Workshop: "Creating Messages that Move." 9:00 AM-11:00 AM
[College of Alameda, Student Union, Bldg. F.](#)
Reserve with Alice Fried, alicefried89@gmail.com
- Thu. Sept. 17th**
7:00-9:00 PM
Board meeting: [Alameda Hospital Conference Room C \(first floor\)](#)
All LWVA members are welcome to attend.
- Mon. Sept. 21st**
7:00-9:00 PM
Fall open membership meeting
[Alameda Hospital Conference Room A \(third floor\)](#)
Launch of LWVA's programs and priorities for 2015-2016
- Sat. Sept. 26th**
2:00-4:00 PM
Hot Topics discussion: "Sanctuary Cities in the News" facilitated by Keasha Martindill. [Alameda Free Library, Family Study Room.](#)
More information on page 4; reserve dixonmueller@yahoo.com
- Mon Sept. 28th**
3:00 PM
Book club: [Applebee's Restaurant](#) Conference Room (South Shore)
More information on page 4 (see box)
- Fri. Oct. 2nd**
5:30 PM
First Friday no-host social dinner
October venue TBA. Everyone is welcome!
Reserve by noon Fri. connie.hanna@comcast.net
- Wed. Oct. 21st**
7:00-9:00 PM
Community forum: "California's 'Top Two' Open Primaries: How Democratic Are They?" [State Controller Betty Yee](#), panel TBA
[Alameda Free Library, Conference Room.](#)
- Sat. Nov. 7th**
9:30 AM-12 PM panel
1:00 PM – 2:30 PM tour
Community forum and bus tour: "What Developments Are Coming to Alameda?" Co-sponsored with Alameda Home Team and Alameda Association of Realtors. Panel of developers and City Planner Andrew Thomas. [Alameda Elks Lodge.](#)
- Thu. Nov. 12th**
7:00-9:00 PM
Community forum: "Getting On and Off the Island: What's in Alameda's Transportation Future?" Panel of representatives of City Planning Dept., Alameda Transportation Commission, AC Transit.
[Alameda Free Library.](#)
- Sun. Dec. 13th**
5:30 PM
Holiday Party: Potluck supper for LWVA members and guests at the home of Alice Fried, 742 Palmera Court.
-
- Thu. March 31st**
5:30-7:30 PM
MEET YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS (MYPO): Annual Fundraiser: [Speed date your representatives](#); raffle; silent auction; food, drink, and community celebration. [Harbor Bay Community Center](#)

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

New members: A big WELCOME to Bill Cox and Diane Puntteney who joined us in August (bill@QSWtools.com). LWVA now has 128 members, an all-time high!

Committee plans: Gearing up for the 2015-2016 season, the Membership Committee is eager to recruit two or three more people to work with us (currently Ruth Dixon-Mueller, Marian Breitbart and Shubha Fanse). We'll be pitching for volunteers at the September 21st General Membership Meeting. Contact membership@LWVAlameda.org or call Ruth at 510-865-2439.

“Hot topics”: Building on the success of last year's program, we're planning to hold six or eight “Hot Topics” discussions in the Library this coming year open to community members as well. Propose a topic to us and facilitate an informal small group discussion! It's fun!

Last year's topics included “Should Alameda Adopt a Rent Control Policy?” facilitated by Elizabeth Tuckwell; “How Do California's Voting Systems Determine Who Wins and Who Loses?” (Anne Spanier); “California's Ballot Propositions: What's Coming?” (Dorothy Fullerton); “Do Sexist Media Portrayals Keep Women Out of Leadership Roles and Politics?” (Dorie Guess Behrstock); and “Transparency in Local Government; How Does It Work in Alameda?” (Juelle-Ann Boyer)

HOT TOPICS POLICY DISCUSSION on Sat. Sept. 26, 2-4 PM in the Family Study Room, Alameda Free Library.

Topic: “SANCTUARY CITIES: WHAT ARE THEY, AND WHAT DO THEY AIM TO DO?”

Sanctuary cities are much in the news these days, under attack by their critics and defended by their advocates. But what are they, and what do they aim to do? Does their policy of noncooperation with federal immigration directives risk public safety and encourage illegal immigration, or does it protect communities and advance social justice? **Join us, and share your ideas!**

Facilitator: Keasha Martindill. **Please pre-register** (space limit: 12 persons) with Ruth at 510-865-2439 or email membership@LWVAlameda.org

Book Club

The Book Club meets Monday September 28 @ 3:00 pm at Applebees Restaurant conference room.

The book to be discussed is Next of Kin by Roger Fouts. It describes Fouts' odyssey beginning with a mischievous baby chimp and the pioneering work of teaching sign language to the chimp. Living and conversing with these sensitive creatures gives Fouts a profound appreciation of their abilities. Fouts becomes an impassioned crusader for the rights of animals. Join us... we have fun! Discussion is lively, interesting, and challenging. For guidelines about book selection go to lwvalameda.org/files/2015bookclub.pdf.

The next book club meeting will be on **Monday October 26 @3:30 at Applebees**. The book to be discussed is Beautiful Struggle by Te-Nehisi Coates.

Contact Felice Zensius at felicez@ymail.com (yes that's a “y” in “ymail”) for further information.

NOTES ON LWVA AUGUST 1ST BOARD RETREAT

Eighteen LWVA members* participated in the Board Retreat to discuss plans and priorities for the coming year. We covered three major areas:

1. League study, education and advocacy plans and LWVA's possible participation:

Anne Spanier reported on two proposed studies: 1) LWVUS 2016 study of a possible Constitutional Amendment regarding money as speech and an update of campaign finance position related to **Money in Politics** (Citizens United); 2) LWVC's planned study of **Access to Higher Education**, still not ready. We'll maintain contact and wait for more information.'

Felice Zensius reported on the proposed **Prop 13 "Make It Fair Initiative."** Sen. Loni Hancock has submitted bill SCA5 to place an initiative on Nov. 2016 ballot to revise commercial but not residential property assessments for tax purposes. CA Leagues will all work to support this.

Alice and Anne will be active in the Alameda County Council (Fremont, Eden, Alameda, Oakland/Piedmont, Berkeley/Albany/Emeryville Leagues) and keep us informed of League issues at the county level. LWVA local positions on Disaster Preparedness and Land Use will be updated.

2. Committee plans for 2015-2016: Alice requested committee chairs to prepare one-page description of goals, meeting times and volunteer positions for the Membership Meeting on Sept. 21st. All of the committees summarized their plans for 2015-2016. Ted Frey and Ruth Dixon-Mueller were elected to the 2015-16 Nominating Committee (with Karen Scanlon, Dorie Guess Behrstock and Helen Sause, elected at June Annual Meeting).

The **Communications Committee** is especially active with new chair Georgia Gates Derr coordinating and funneling information to Publicity manager Jon Spangler, Web manager Lisa Yap, Mail Chimp manager Keasha Martindill, and VOTER editor Mari Clark. Georgia also proposed that LWVA organize an Observer Corps for systematic reporting on local meetings, beginning with City Council (handout) and extending to other Boards and Commissions.

3. Co-Presidents' goals for 2015-2016:

Alice's major goals are to continue improving the communications process and engage more members in the League's educational and advocacy work. Alice also talked of her ideas for a high school debate scholarship contest and for the September communications workshop and membership meetings. **Anne** hopes to promote several key issues for LWVA study and action. In particular she would like to see us initiate a study of California's Open Primary system to present to the League of Women Voters of California convention for adoption when completed. Motion to approve a Board recommendation of the study for vote at the Sept. 21st general meeting was passed (and a good time was had by all)!

* Alice Fried, Anne Spanier, Ted Frey, Donna Vaughn, Kate Quick, Deborah Wright, Felice Zensius, Mari Clark, Karen Scanlon, Juelle-Ann Boyer, Marilyn Ng, Shubha Fanse, Marian Breitbart, Keasha Martindill, Georgia Gates Derr, Robby Kiley, Anne McKereghan, Ruth Dixon-Mueller.

COMMUNICATIONS

Have something to say? Write us a letter!

The VOTER is pleased to announce a new “Letters from Readers” section. Letters may be submitted by any VOTER reader or recipient and addressed to any League-related topic, activity, position, or issue. Letters should be brief (no more than 100 words), clear, civil, and may include hyperlinks. Author’s names will be published. Phone and email contacts should be sent with your submission but may be withheld at your request. The VOTER editor will screen and edit all submissions for length, content, and clarity, and may call on other members of the Communications Committee or LWVA’s Board for consultation.

Have something to say? Write VOTER editor Mari Clark, meclark922@gmail.com. The VOTER appears in your email inbox on the first of the month, 10 issues per year. Watch for it!

COMMENTARY

How Transparent is Alameda’s City Government?

By Keasha Martindill

Is our city government transparent? What does that mean, and why does it matter? What should citizens do? What and how can the city do better?

The Alameda League of Women Voters hosted a “Hot Topics” event in June to discuss a number of issues relating to open government. What follows are notes of participants’ individual opinions; they are NOT official League positions or conclusions. LWVUS supports transparency at all levels of government.

What is Transparency?

Those who make decisions for the public do this as openly as possible.

They are aware of perceptions and work to gain public trust. The public can hold those who govern accountable; those who govern are accessible.

Laws that Apply to City Government

The public may use these laws to ascertain transparency [all documents are accessible on line]:

- The Ralph M. Brown Act ensures the public’s right to attend and take part in local policy body meetings.
- The California Public Records Act (CPRA) lets the public access state and local government documents.
- Alameda’s Sunshine Ordinance builds upon the Brown Act and the CPRA. It can make greater demands than state law requires.

Is There a Downside to Transparency?

Make no mistake; we need transparency. But it may limit getting things done. It is a knife point: a balance hard to get right.

The Brown Act, for example, hampers free flowing talk between policy body members. This is because of rules against serial meetings that equal a quorum. If a body has five members, two may meet privately to discuss business. But neither can talk about it later with other members.

Following the law is often not enough; perceived intent also matters. Referrals are items placed on an agenda by a city council member. The council may schedule referrals for discussion at a future meeting. They may also vote on a referral right away with no report for consideration. Those who do not attend a meeting, because they think no vote will happen, are now voice-less. Those who attend may not be ready for a final decision.

How Can Citizens Improve Transparency?

Public input is essential and can lead to better decisions, garner trust in authority, and improve community harmony.

Many Alamedans attend and take part in city meetings. Residents voice their opinions often in print and on-line. But they can do even more.

The city website (alamedaca.gov) is a handy tool citizens can use to become informed and to foster openness. One can find minutes and agendas of open meetings posted there. Those who attend should review these items for accuracy.

The website also provides links to key documents such as the municipal code and city budget. They help people understand how the city government functions.

The most important document is the City Charter. It defines the city's powers and explains how the city is organized.

The city website provides descriptions of all boards, commissions and committees. Residents can apply online to volunteer for one of these bodies. This is a direct way to influence city governance. Boards, commissions, and committees vet meaty issues. Then, they recommend actions to the city council.

Social media and newspapers are other ways for people to stay informed. City leaders should strive to share information by all media channels available.

How Can City Government Improve Transparency?

The Sunshine law created the Open Government Commission. It advises city council on openness. It hears related complaints from the public. Currently this body only meets twice a year and people may only lodge a complaint within 15 days of an event.

It was suggested that the Open Government Commission could become more visible and garner wider input on transparency if meetings were held more often.

Other suggestions:

- Manage length of meetings; adjourn when possible before 11:00pm
- Use workshops to educate people and charettes to get public input
- Work to index all videos of posted meetings; non-indexed videos are burdensome and less user friendly
- Ensure appropriate public notice; post all accompanying reports and background documents.
- Craft succinct and comprehensive meeting minutes.

Democracy in Action

Transparency is the act of making decisions in the open. Closed meetings may be valid, but are rare. Officials listen to the people. It is hard to say if our city is transparent. This is not objectively measured. But the city and its people are both responsible for achieving it. There are great benefits of an informed public who participates. Yes, the process is thorny and messy. But, this is democracy in action.

City of Alameda Asks for Citizen Input on Hazard Mitigation

The City of Alameda is looking at natural and man-made hazards to our community, such as earthquakes, storms, and fires. We are determining what can be done to make Alameda more prepared, responsive, and

resilient to any future disaster. People who live and work in Alameda are encouraged to participate in our planning process.

A survey is available now, on the City website and in paper copies at the Mastick Senior Center, the Alameda Free Library, and City Hall. We'd like to know what hazards you have experienced, what you are concerned about, and what you think the City should do about them.

For more information on the Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, please see the web page <http://alamedaca.gov/hazard-mitigation-planning> or contact Erin Smith, Public Works Coordinator, 717-7938.

National Voter Registration Day (September 22) Volunteers Needed

Each year, millions of Americans don't vote because they forget to register or miss the deadline. Let's make sure no one is left out! If you would like to volunteer to assist students at the College of Alameda register to vote, please contact Georgia Gates Derr t.derr@comcast.net

Money in Politic\$: Study Opportunities and Local Events

The LWVUS has asked Leagues across the country to participate in a study of money in politics with the purpose of updating their position on campaign funding. The LWV of Berkeley Albany Emeryville, LWV of Oakland and LWV of Piedmont are combining forces in this study and have asked Alameda League to join them. We can participate only if we have 3-4 volunteers who are willing to attend meetings and participate in discussions on this topic. Please contact Anne Spanier if you are willing to make this commitment.

Thursday, October 8 at 6:30 PM, at the Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda, Berkeley
The LWVBAE offers a panel focusing on disclosure, featuring Jay Costa, Executive Director of CounterPac, and Miriam Marks, Data Director of Maplight. Call LWVBAE at 843-8824 for more information, if you wish to attend the dinner and film showing that precede it.

Thursday October 15 at 6 PM in City Council Chambers, Oakland City Hall
The LWV Oakland in partnership with the city of Oakland Public Ethics Commission presents a forum featuring Ann Ravel, Chair of the Federal Election Commission and former head of California's Fair Political Practices Commission, sharing her experiences and challenges she faces, along with her own assessments of possible solutions to this problem. Paul Ryan of the Campaign Legal Center, will fill us in on campaign finance laws and regulations at national, state and local levels.

Wednesday October 28 at 6 PM in Conference Room 710 at 436 14th Street, corner of Broadway and 14th near Oakland City Center. Come learn and share your views with local experts at a LWV Oakland Hot Topics informal roundtable discussion on Money in Politics.

Wednesday November 4 at 6 PM in Oakland City Hall, room to be announced
Public information program on the process for amending the Constitution and how to evaluate potential amendments featuring Jonathan Klein of ACLU and Common Cause

Saturday November 7 (Save the Date) time and location to be announced
The Constitutional Amendment subcommittee will organize and moderate the official consensus questions session on the Constitutional Amendment.

INTRODUCING OUR CO-PRESIDENTS



New Orleans native **Alice Fried** (on the right in photo) attended Tulane University and later worked in public relations at the Delta Queen Steamboat Company before moving to California 28 years ago with her husband, Frank Fried, who died in January 2015.

Alice has two published books: a nonfiction work, *MENOPAUSE, SISTERHOOD AND TENNIS*, and the award-winning first book in her mystery trilogy called *OUTSIDE CHILD*, set in pre-Katrina New Orleans. She is currently working on the sequels to *Outside Child*, to be set during and after Hurricane Katrina.

Alice joined the League of Women Voters of Alameda in 2010 after being recruited by her friend and former tennis partner, Anne Spanier. She joined to support the organization's mission to inform and encourage citizens to participate in our democracy and to commemorate her mother, who was turned away from the League because of her race in the 1950s.

Alice is the mother of two, stepmother of three, and grandmother of nine, and enjoys tennis, reading, and writing when she is not busy with her family.

* * * * *

Anne Spanier first joined the League of Women Voters (LWV) in Oakland about 35 years ago. She became more active in the LWV after moving to Cincinnati in 1990, when friends told her that she should become active there to meet "intelligent, engaged women."

On returning to Oakland, Anne became an Oakland League board member and Chair of Voter Service. In 2006, she was part of a small group that mounted a campaign for Ranked Choice Voting, which was adopted in Oakland. Anne moved to Alameda, joined the League of Women Voters of Alameda in 2006—and looked up her former tennis partner, Alice Wilson-Fried. She was elected Co-president in 2009, 2010, and in 2015.

"Our voting system has been under assault almost since the day the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965," says Anne, who champions election reform and voting rights. She adds, "I believe the League is most potent when it works to sustain those rights."

Anne Spanier received her nursing degrees from UCSF and a doctorate in education from USF. She taught community health and long-term care nursing at California State University East Bay, at USF, and in Ohio until retiring in 2003. In addition to keeping busy with the League, Anne plays tennis, reads, and travels.

Join or renew your membership to the Alameda League today!



Name _____

Other Names _____

(if a family membership)

Address _____ City _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

\$70 Single Membership \$97 Family Membership free Student Membership (full-time, voting age, enroll by mail only) Dues year is Jan 1 – Dec 31.

Printed and mailed VOTER Fee: \$10. (Digital newsletter is free.)

Make check payable to LWV Alameda and mail to: League of Women Voters of Alameda, P. O. Box 1645, Alameda, CA 94501. Membership dues are tax deductible. To pay online, fill out the form at http://lwvalameda.org/join_form.html

Consider a Donation to the League

Please consider adding \$5 or more to your renewal check, or at any time to LWV Alameda, P. O. Box 1645, Alameda, CA 94501.