



APRIL GENERAL MEETING

Transportation Update

Friday, April 9 at Noon

St. Paul's United Methodist Church
5501 Main St. 77004

Speaker:

David Crossley
President of Houston Tomorrow

Box Lunch is \$10

Mail a check or call the office with your credit card
713-784-2923

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Nancy Parra

Maggie Duncan, Elections and Youth Engagement Program Specialist, LWV US, visited the Houston League this week and spoke to the Board. Maggie was in Houston to observe the high school visits the Houston Area League has been making as part of the LWV US Youth Engagement Project. This project's focus is to register seniors in high school to vote and to get them involved in the election process. Houston was chosen as one of the participating cities because of its diverse population and large school districts. Houston's program will serve as a model for program development in other cities.

I hope many of you are planning to attend the LWV TX 2010 Convention in San Marcos. Our League is among the 50-year leagues being honored, and all 50-year members will be honored. Houston Area League member Terry Hershey is receiving the Individual Environmental Awareness award. Mary G. Wilson, President, LWV US, is the featured speaker.

We are nearing the end of the year's League activities and are beginning to plan for our Annual Meeting, being held on Thursday, May 13. The annual meeting is one of the most important general membership meetings of the year. It gives you a chance to shape the future of the Houston League and to enjoy being a member of the organization. Mark your calendars and plan to attend this year's meeting.

Ann Herbage and Leslie Taylor are already working on the silent auction. If you have any interesting items you would like to donate, bring them to the office.

Transportation Update

By Carolyn Mata

David Crossley, president of Houston Tomorrow, will be the speaker at the April General Meeting. Houston Tomorrow, formerly known as the Gulf Coast Institute, was founded in 1998 to explore urban issues and to inform the discussion of growth in the Houston Gulf Coast Region.

Mr. Crossley will bring us up to date on livability and transportation issues in the Houston area.

Meet at St Paul's United Methodist located on Main Street between Binz & Calumet.

Houston League's Annual Meeting

Mark your calendars—May 13 at 5:30, the Annual Meeting will be held at Bayland Community Center. You will vote on what issues to study next year, the new board members, and the budget for 2010-2011. Collect your items for the silent auction and plan to participate in the bidding.

The Annual Meeting workbook will be on the website by April 13. Check it out and prepare to attend.

Bayland Community Center is located at 6400 Bissonnet west of Hillcroft.

CALENDAR

April 5-9	Early Voting
April 9	General Meeting, Transportation
April 13	Runoff Election Briefing, 2:00 p.m., League Office
April 14	May VOTER Deadline
April 15-20	Units
April 16	Board Meeting, 10 a.m., League Office
April 23-25	LWVTX Convention, San Marcos
April 28	VOTER Mailing

Connection Future Legislators with Civil Society: Columbia & Brazil

The Houston Area League was selected to participate in the program Connecting Future Legislators with Civil Society, a program funded by the Bureau of Educational Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Five other Leagues are participating in the project: San Diego, CA; Miami, FL; McLean County, IL; Johnson County, KS; and Duluth, MN.. Each league is hosting two fellows from either Colombia or Brazil. The fellows arrive in Miami on April 6 for an orientation and then leave for their hosting cities.

Our League is hosting two fellows from Colombia, Monica Andrea Arias from Dosquebradas, Pereira, and Ingrid Janneth Alarcon from Bogota. Both women are 31 years old. Monica is a journalist and is particularly interested in the role of elected officials in shaping and/or writing development projects and in communication channels for elected officials and their constituencies. Ingrid is interested in working with national parks and in the issue of immigrants and how they are treated and welcome – or not in the community.

The fellows arrive in Houston Friday, April 9 and will be here until Saturday, May 2. The hosting families are League members Connie and Paul Jennings and Mary Schulz. The fellows will be interning with Council Member Ed Gonzalez, District H and Council Member James Rodriguez, District I.

We are planning a welcoming reception with League members and will keep everyone posted on the details. We have a lot of activities planned for the fellows and are looking forward to their arrival in Houston.

Volunteers Needed For High School Project

The LWV-HA was asked by LWVUS to be a partner in the 2010 Youth Engagement Project.

The aim of this project, which sends League members into high school classrooms to register eligible students to vote, is to determine which of two voter registration methods – classroom or assembly based- is most effective and best implemented.

The LWV-HA involvement will include visits to approximately 25 public high schools in Harris County . LWV-HA staff and members have contacted school administrators and teachers to ask if we may come into 12th grade government classes to make our presentation and to register those students eligible to vote in the November, 2010 elections.

This project is funded by a grant from the LWVUS and will require League volunteers to work in 2-3 hour shifts at the various schools. For more information or to sign up, please contact Christina at the League office, 713-784-2923.



Marge O'Connor The new Chairperson of the International Affairs Committee

Welcome New Chair Marge O'Conner

By Millie Whittington

The new chair of the International Affairs Committee is Marge O'Connor. She is a retired energy lawyer. Her legal career was spent doing gas regulatory work in Houston and Washington, D.C., and giving counsel to billion-dollar liquefied natural gas projects overseas.

She moved to Houston in 1980 after graduation from Suffolk University School of Law in Boston. Prior to that move, she had taught elementary school in Massachusetts for 10 years, in New York for 3 years, and in Hawaii for one year. She holds a bachelor's degree from College of New Rochelle in New York, with majors in English and Education, and took credits towards a masters degree at Northeastern University and University of Hawaii. She worked her way through college doing accounting, through high school working at a telephone answering service, and through grade school doing various jobs such as gardening, carrying groceries, and being a mother's helper.

Since retirement, Marge has done contract work for small businesses, tax work, and pro bono work for the Houston Bar Association. She currently co-chairs their Senior Lawyer Committee. Among other volunteer activities, she is a supporter of the World Affairs Council, served on the Board of her college's alumnae/alumni association, coordinates a committee at her condominium, and moderates a Great Decisions discussion group.

LWVUS Takes Control of Arms Control

By Millie Whittington

Are Iran and North Korea trying to make nuclear weapons? If so, does anybody care? You bet we do. Nuclear proliferation is one of the scourges of our time, especially when some of the “have” nations are terrorist-friendly.

A new proposed LWVUS arms control position has been prepared by a Task Force of experts. Whether it will be adopted at LWVUS Convention or undergo the national consensus process is not decided at this time.

Much of the core of the 1983 League position is retained. Several of the old and new ideas are of special note. Provision Seven reads, “The League does not support tying progress in arms control to other issues. The League believes that arms control is too important in and of itself and too crucial to all nations to be linked to other foreign and military policy goals.” Keeping arms control outside of political entanglements is devoutly to be wished. Another section clarifies the essential factors of arms control: Equity, Verifiability, Confidence Building, Widespread Agreement, Environmental Protection, and Continuity.

Whether the revised position is adopted at Convention or by national consensus, it’s the adoption that counts, for it is a well-crafted document entirely applicable to the times we live in. The proposed position is on the LWVUS website.

Police Advisory Committee

Barb Swartz

Acting Chief McClelland said the current cadet class is the largest one in the history of the department, with 70 cadets. There will be two more classes this fiscal year. HPD currently has 5200 officers and attrition has slowed, good news since there are fewer classes this year. He added there are 4,000 applicants for 70 positions in the next class. This means an increase in the quality of officers. Efforts in diversity are also improving.

He reported that Mayor Parker is prioritizing neighborhood inspections by adding eight inspectors. A recent city ordinance requires regular inspections for multi-family residences.

McClelland reported that HPD is addressing officer involved shooting that increased from last year. They are looking at synopses of each incident and will review training options.

He noted there will be challenges coming with necessary budget adjustments in the future. There are tough choices with tax collections down and tax delinquencies up.

Concurrence at LWV-TX Convention?

Lynn Walshak

Efforts to gain support from the Texas Leagues for having LWV-TX concur with the position of LWV-HA relative to mandatory HOAs, have been carried out by sending a summarizing document with two attachments to thirty local Leagues and the state office in Austin. It is further planned to have a caucus at the convention to further inform League members of the extent of this issue.

A Senate Intergovernmental Relations Committee hearing will meet on Wednesday, April 7 at 9:00 a.m., at Texas Southern University, Mickey Leland Barbara Jordan School of Public Affairs, Lecture Hall 114, located at 3802 Tierwester (at the corner of Tierwester St and Cleburne St). The Committee will hear invited and public testimony relative to current law governing homeowners associations with respect to “ensuring that homeowners are given adequate protections against unfair foreclosures and are given proper channels for redress in case of foreclosure.”

Houston Food Pantry

Barb Swartz

I learned today the Houston Food Bank is one of four cities participating in a pilot program for Food Stamp distribution. The Houston Food Bank serves 450 agencies in 18 counties. They have 14 coordinators who help the agencies fill out the forms for those seeking help and send them in. Fingerprinting is not required. The waiting period has been cut from 4-6 weeks to 2-3 weeks.

They are using some bilingual personnel which have increased the Latino user population from 300 last year to about 1600 at the present time.

Texas is one of three states in the country requiring fingerprinting from both parents. This is a large disincentive for families, as some of the fathers are reluctant to ask for help. Frequently the mother of the family is the one who is applying.

It is hoped the evaluation of this one year pilot program will show the value of changing the procedure. Texas presently gets only 11 percent of what they are entitled.

HELP WANTED!

The League needs an observer for the County Commissioner’s Court. Sharon Friedman, along with her husband, did this for many years. If you are interested in taking on this job, call Sharon, 281-495-4373. She will be glad to answer your questions.

City Council Reports

Shirley Gibson Reporting

February 14, 2010

The Council meeting began with a request from the Mayor to confirm the appointment of Mr. Omar C. Reid as director of the Human Resources Department. Mr. Reid and several members of HOPE were present and gave Mr. Reid applause.

The Mayor's report followed with a video about the manned space program. **She is very concerned that the Congress is cutting the funding for the Constellation Program.**

Mayor Parker has appointed a committee, composed of the following groups: local congressional representatives; state legislators; city officials; county officials; Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership; and Greater Houston Partnership. The Mayor is giving everyone a packet on how to contact key people concerned with funding for the space program.

Council Member Sullivan, the council member representing the Bay Area and Johnson Space Center, said there are 18,000 people that work at the Johnson Space Center. He mentioned that if you take away the Constellation Program students and those that aspire to work in the space industry would become discouraged. Jobs will be lost and the scientists that work at the Johnson Space Center will be lost to the NASA community. The economy will suffer considerably.

The Mayor said that the first word spoken from the moon was Houston; Houston is important to the space program and the space program is important to Houston.

March 3, 2010

The agenda moved rapidly through items of business to three items tagged by Council Member Jones. One was an ordinance-amending chapter 42 of the code of ordinances; the property in subdivisions was allowed to be replatted. Council Member Jones wanted to see the homeowner and residences of a subdivision to have more say in the replatting of a lot within the subdivision. She hopes to see more power for the homeowner.

Council Member Gonzales tagged ordinance 17 that dealt with affordable housing in Uptown. He wanted to see the TIRZ expanded to include more of his district.

Council Member Johnson wanted to have two CIP meetings in his district because he said that his district was spread out. Mayor Parker said that the only district that will have two CIP meetings is District E because Kingwood is so far from Clear Lake.

Several other council members also wanted two CIP's for their districts. Mayor Parker said that because she was being fair with each district there is only one CIP to a district.

Council Member Bradford commended the police, especially the mounted police, for their fine work during the

rodeo parade.

March 10, 2010

The meeting began with the monthly Controller's report. This report foretold a short fall. After the report from Controller Green, Mayor Parker said the current year budget is not yet finalized. We have not received final certification of revenues for the General Fund from the controller's office but should receive that by the beginning of March.

Finance revenue estimate for sources of funds (including additional use of fund balance) is \$29.3 million lower than the adopted budget. Due to this decrease, we have reduced department's expenditures by \$17.4 million. The percentage of property tax revenue is 6% less than it was in 2009. The FY2011 budget currently shows a gap of \$99.5 million.

She went on to say the five-year forecast says there will be ongoing pressure in FY2011 and 2012 with increased expenditures outstripping revenues.

The five-year forecast will be presented to the fiscal affairs committee on March 26. This will include an outline of priorities for spending, policies established, and strategies for closing the gap.

The department's budgets will be finalized during the month of April and presented to Council and the public May 12.

March 24, 2010

Today the Lakewood Church property came up for sale. Council Members Jones and Costello immediately tagged the Ordinance. Mr. Christi came to the table to speak for the sale. He said that Lakewood leased the property for thirty years with the stipulation that at the end of the thirty years they could renew for the same rate. Lakewood spent considerable money and time renovating the property and paid the lease money up front. There is an agreement that no commercial use of the property be allowed for ten years following the lease agreement.

Council Members Johnson, Jones, Stardig, and others said that they would like a committee meeting to air this agreement. The meeting of the Fiscal Office Committee will meet at 3:00 PM on Monday, March 29.

The conversation continued with Council Member Noriega saying that the property HISD sold in this area was very valuable and she wanted to know how much they got for the Administration Bldg. and the school. She believes that we are not asking enough for the Lakewood property.

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Doris Pryzant
Nora Laufman
Gwen Essinger
Kay Guenther
Patricia Day
Isabel Wilson
John Copeland
Sean Kenneth Connelly
Gloria Herman
Frances Burford
Keith & Charlotte Bowers
Silver Eagle
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Adelyn Bernstein
Jeanette Bednar
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Welcome to these new and returning members:

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APRIL UNIT MEETINGS

**Third Monday, April 19
Southwest Day, 1 p.m.**

Alief Library
7979 South Kirkwood
Rhoda Haddox
(713)667-5952

West Harris Co., 2:00 p.m.

Eagles Trace, unit PW 117
Joan Golding, 281-596-0935

Citywide Evening, 6 p.m.

Black Lab Pub
4100 Montrose
Jackie Friedman
(713)521-0702

**Third Tuesday, April 20
Spring Branch, 9:30 a.m.**

The Buckingham
8580 Woodway Drive, 4th Floor
Margaret Kolodzie
(713)465-1068

**Third Thursday, April 15
Midwest, 9:30 a.m.**

Gerald Womack Building
4412 Alameda
Yvette Calloway
(713)747-6555
Millie Whittington
(281)752-0446

**Third Saturday, April 17
New Member/Saturday
Unit, 10 a.m.**

League office
4001 N. Shepherd, Suite 213
Houston, 77018
Shirley Gibson
281-493-2875

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Attend the Unit Meeting of your choice and join the Transportation discussion with the following questions:

1. Are there problems with Houston’s current transportation planning?
2. Are the listed benefits of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) relevant to you personally? To the public at large? In what way?
3. Which, if any, of the concerns do you share?
4. What is the difference between a “mobility” plan and a “transportation” plan? Which does Houston need?
5. How important are wide sidewalks or street trees to an effective pedestrian environment?
6. Is TOD appropriate for Houston?

Unit Meetings are The League at its Grass Roots Best



*Feb. General Meeting on Health Care, left to right
Freddy Warner, Nancy Parra, Gwen Essinger, Rep. Al Green*



Dr. Ron Sass, our speaker on Climate Change in March



Houston League celebrated its 90th birthday in February



Rhoda Haddox and Joan Golding enjoying the Birthday Party

The Houston VOTER is published 10 times per year by the League of Women Voters of the Houston Area. This newsletter is provided as part of yearly membership dues. Non-members may purchase a subscription. Contact the office for details.

Nancy Parra – President
Christine Gorszynski – Executive Director
Barb Swartz – Editor

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