



VOTER

December 14, 2009

CALENDAR

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January 2010

1 Happy New Year

**5 Tuesday Topics -
Topeka and Shawnee
County Public Library,
11:30**

**Speaker- -Philicia McKee
& Sally Zellers -** They will
give a fresh view on commu-
nity development

MENU: Chicken a la
King on a pastry shell with
fruit cup, assorted cake, iced
tea and coffee

**12 LWVT/SC Board Meet-
ing - Topeka and
Shawnee County Public
Library,** upstairs meeting
room, all members welcome,
11:30-1:00

**21 Voice Meeting-Topeka
and Shawnee County
Public Library, Marvin
Auditorium 5:30 pm**

February 2010

**2 Tuesday Topics -
YWCA 12th & Van Bu-
ren, 11:30**

Speaker-Brad Bowden—

Professor Borden will
have an enlightened discus-
sion of the harsh realities of
the State of Kansas fiscal
situation and healthy ap-
proaches.

MENU: Baked chicken
breast on a bed of wild rice,
tossed salad, vegetable,
dessert, rolls, iced tea and
coffee. The cost will be \$10.

**9 Place to be announced
later, 11:30-1:00**

12 VOTER DEADLINE
send articles to
lois5510@hotmail.com or
Lois Cox 910 SE 43rd
Street, 66609

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of public issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Prez Sez



Gwen Elliott President LWVT/SC

As we reach the end of the calendar year, we are mourning the death of our good friend, League and Board member, Pat Stinson. Her memorial service will be held on January 12, 2010.

We are very pleased that former League president, Grace Wilson, has agreed to join the current Board. Already, she has begun the assignment of writing summaries of Tuesday Topics Speakers' remarks for the Voter, and she will be helping in other assignments as well. Welcome back to the Board, Grace!

Thanks to the diligent

work of many board members, we have had a very active League year. Some of the highlights included hosting League Day at the Public Library on October 17th on the topic of the Quest for a More Diverse Judiciary and our submission of a grant proposal to continue to advance the campaign for a diverse judiciary.

Thanks to Membership Chair Nancy Shaughnessy and the work of her committee, including Diana Siegal, we held a successful membership event on October 27th at the Washburn Law School with Dr. Paula Doress-Worters as our speaker on the writings of Ernestine Rose, early women's rights leader.

Under the leadership of Georgia Sandlin, our League held two informative VOICE meetings on the local study, Fact Finding on K-12 Education in Shawnee County.

Teresa Stambaugh and her committee completed a successful finance drive this fall, while Anita Epps and her committee registered voters on many occasions.

Brenda Guilfoyle invited Shawnee County Legislators and the media to our November Tuesday Topics , which resulted in in-

teresting speeches and good media exposure. Marge Ahrens has continued to find excellent and timely speakers for other Tuesday Topics. Maryanna Quilty has made sure we have the great accommodations at the Public Library as often as they are available.

Our treasurer, Sybil Wiegman, keeps us operating in the black, while our secretary, Lea Billinger, sends information and minutes for Board meetings. Lois Cox informs our membership through the Voter, and Carol Yoho maintains a very current website for us at LWVTSC.

In addition to Grace, we are pleased to have new board member, Liz Post, taking on many of the tasks Pat Stinson did for us.

We are fortunate to have many active members in addition to Board members, who support our League very diligently. It is indeed a pleasure to serve with so many dedicated people. We wish you happy holidays and a wonderful new year.

T/SCLWV Receive State Grant

League of Woman Voters of Topeka/Shawnee County received a grant in the amount of \$3,600 to participate in the project Safeguarding U.S. Democracy: Quest for a More Diverse Judiciary. Some of what we will be doing: 1. Co-sponsoring a TV forum in 2010, 2. Ads in Topeka-Capital Journal; and 3. Research on judges and attorneys of Shawnee County and promotional and educational materials.

Tuesday Topics: January 5

Local Beautification and Safety

Directors of two outstanding Topeka/Shawnee county service organizations will present philosophies and activities that contribute to our community environment at our January Tuesday Topics luncheon meeting. **Philicia McKee**, a LWV member, educator and noted community Scouting volunteer, has been Director of Keep American Beautiful-Topeka/Shawnee county since 2005. This year the organization won a national award for its beautification activities in our area. In addition, **Sally Zellers**, staff member of Topkea/Shawnee County Safe Streets Coalition since 1995 will talk about how Safe Streets works to improve the quality of our lives. Sally is a trainer for the Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America. She serves on the Police/Citizen's Advisory Council, Heartland Visioning Steering Committee and as a community member of the Capital Journal Editorial Board. **Join us for a fresh view of community development!**

Tuesday Topics: February 2

State Taxes: Stopping the Bleeding

On the heels of Dale Dennis from the State Department of Education, our LWV local education study committee reaches again to the state with concerns about education funding. Our February guest, **Brad Borden**, is a professor at the Washburn University School of Law where he teaches tax law and policy. A prolific author and speaker, professor Borden has recently enlightened discussion of the harsh realities of the State of Kansas fiscal situation and healthy approaches to resolving the depletion of state income. Join us on February 2 at the YWCA, 12th & Van Buren for lunch and lecture/discussion from 11:30AM to 1:00PM (or for as long as you are able to attend). Bring your questions and hopes for regaining state fiscal strength!

VOICE meeting on Program Planning

January 21, 2010 Topeka/Shawnee County Public Library

Each year, a small percentage of our members attend the Program Planning VOICE meeting to choose the local study for the coming year. The members who attend have the power to decide the study direction of our League for an entire year. If you have interest in our local studies, this is a meeting you will not want to miss. This year, it will be held at 5:30 p.m. on January 21st in a section of the Marvin Auditorium. The Millennium Café will be open until 5:30, so persons who want to eat can get food there to take into the meeting by arriving a few minutes early. We hope to see you there!

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE TOPEKA CITY COUNCIL FROM OCTOBER 2009 TO DECEMBER 4, 2009

BY JOE SARGENT

In mid-October the city staff released its proposed plan for using the half-cent sales tax for repairing the city's infrastructure which became effective October 1st. This tax is estimated to raise slightly over \$153 million over the next ten years; during this period about half of all city street surfaces would be repaired. The council will need to approve what is done on a yearly basis as part of its usual process in approving the Capital Improvement Budget [CIB] and the Capital Improvement Program [CIP]. None of the sales tax revenue will go for projects involving the CIB and CIP.

Later in October the use of revenue from the half-cent sales tax for the Complete Streets concept was discussed. The city administration stated that it embraced the Complete Streets concept but none of the sales tax revenue would be used to implement projects involving the concept. City manager Bonaparte proposed on a case-by-case basis that \$100,000 yearly, financed by general obligation bonds, could be utilized to incorporate this concept into the design of projects funded by the sales tax. On November 24th the council adopted the Complete Streets concept.

The council approved on November 10th the budgets for

the CIB for 2010-2011 and the CIP for 2010-2014. The CIB considers projects that may possibly be approved over the next two years while the CIP lists the priority for projects to be carried out in each of the next five years. As previously stated, a new wrinkle occurred in the budget considerations; the budget from the sales tax revenue was also discussed and passed. Bonaparte's suggestion of setting aside \$100,000 yearly to incorporate Complete Streets design elements into projects funded by the sales tax won approval.

In early November Bonaparte announced that the sales tax revenue for the budget year ending this December was approximately one million dollars below budget. This shortfall will not be serious since revenue from the sales tax makes only 40% of the money that the city collects. Some other revenue sources are property taxes, court fines and fees, and franchise fees.

The Joint Economic Development Organization [JEDO] consisting of representatives three council members and three county commissioners voted on October 14th to spend up to five million dollars [derived from a countywide half-cent sales tax] to purchase slightly over 400 acres for a new industrial park

south of Montara subdivision. They also want to continue options on another previously acquired adjacent 600 acres. This move is necessary since the Central Crossing Commerce Park, a 500 acre industrial park, has only 170 acres left for development.

The zoo has been under scrutiny because of a number of animal deaths. The United States Department of Agriculture inspection on September 28th cited it for non-compliance relating to the death of seven animals. Kansas State University veterinarians had also issued a critical report.

As a result of this, three inspectors from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums will begin a two day visit to the zoo and afterwards will issue a report on conditions at the zoo. Thus, the zoo's accreditation will be under review.

On September 29th the council approved an ordinance to ban smoking in public places as well as places of employment. Exceptions are private residences, except when used for child care, adult day care, or health care facility, retail tobacco stores, outdoor places of employment, and up to 20% of rooms in hotels and motels. This ban took

NOTES ON COUNTY COMMISSION MEETINGS

BY GEORGIA SANDLIN

October 12, 2009

The meeting began with Marti Leisinger, audit/finance and Larry Wilson, county treasurer, reporting on the progress made in reconciling bank statements. Both reported they hoped to be finished with 2008 in a week.

Commissioner Buhler had some questions for Tom Vlach, public works, regarding road work on Wannamaker from SW 53rd to SW 61st. Mr. Vlach reported that there would be detours. The projects should be finished in 2011.

Information technology reported that the "missing" \$25,000 in inventory was caused by a misunderstanding of the new technology and has been corrected.

The commissioners presented a resolution to consolidate the Shawnee County Treasurer's Office with the Shawnee County Audit/Finance Department. Glenda Overstreet, representing the Democratic Party, spoke in opposition as it would eliminate the election of the county treasurer.

October 15, 2009

The commissioners approved eight contracts and requests with few questions or comments. When the resolution to combine the county treasurer's office with the county audit/finance office three citi-

zens, addressed the commission. The repeated theme of the citizen's concerns was the loss of the right to vote for the treasurer. Commissioner Miller tried to convince them that there is no intention to take away voting rights since the commission was proposing that the people vote whether to have an elected county treasurer. They indicated he didn't convince any of them.

October 22, 2009

The first item on the agenda was discussion of treasurer's failure to reconcile bank statements. When Commissioner Miller asked for comments no one responded so the commission went to the consent agenda, approved with no questions. Requests and contracts from the county counselor, emergency management, and public works were approved 3-0 with no questions.

Larry Wilson, county treasurer, reported to the commissioners that there was some difficulty reconciling bank statements each month when credit card swipes were not turned in promptly and money from grants was deposited directly to the bank. According to Mr. Wilson time is spent tracking these transactions that delays the rest of the process. No action was taken on this report but the commissioners had some discussion and suggestions for the department heads involved in an attempt to remedy the problem.

October 26, 2009

The commissioners are paying closer attention when there is a request to cancel and reissue checks. The item on the agenda this morning was discussed and it was determined that the ATM machine "ate the check". It was agreed that sometimes ATM machines do destroy checks so authorization was made. However, the request from another company for a waiver of a replacement check fee was denied 3-0.

The commissioners authorized stop signs in the area of Farley Elementary School and established a maximum speed of 40 mph on a section of SW 21st to make the speed limit more uniform. Commissioner Ensley reported that his wife was in favor of the 35 mph speed limit but this time her influence didn't sway her husband.

John Knight is preparing for 2010 now as his requests of equipment, improvements, and contracts came before the commission and were approved.

Anne Freeze reported to the commission plans for H1N1 immunizations. Clinics will be available for people on the priority 1st, Thursday,

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(council continued on page 4)

registered Topeka voters to bring it to a vote.

The Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority board agreed on October 28th to scale back Sunday and evening service by two hours from 6:30- 8:30pm. The original proposal would have made the cut from 9:30- 11:30pm but public testimony helped to make the change in service hours. Further, the fixed-route structure was changed. These changes will occur in the near future.

In November the police department received a #1.1 million federal stimulus grant to enhance the department's community policing program.

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October 29 at the Expo Centre. The supply of vaccine is limited. More clinics will be held on Nov. 5, 12, 10.

October 29, 2009

The commissioners approved the request to award one bid and waive the bidding process on another item for improvements to the building for the health agency at 1615 SW 8th. The building is over 40 years old so new windows and doors are being installed. The energy savings is expected to be \$15,000 a year.

The county has been invited to be a "visioning partner". Commissioners voted to defer the acceptance of this invitation until they know what the partnership entails.

During Administrative Communications Commissioner Miller expressed concern that the Topeka Capitol-Journal reported a dedication ceremony honoring a person of questionable character was scheduled on county property without permission. John Knight, parks and recreation, was instructed to look into the matter.

November 2, 2009

The Unfinished Business on this morning's commission meeting continues to be the problem of reconciling the monthly bank statements of 2008. Now there is a disagreement as to which department is responsible. Mr. Wilson stated it is the responsibility of audit/finance.

H.R. Cook, Kansas Exponentre, requested matching funds of \$12,000 for the Community Kitchen. The Community Thanksgiving Dinner Committee has raised enough with matching funds for 3 ovens and 2 refrigerators. Myron Johnson, of that committee, was at the meeting to express his appreciation for the help from the commission.

Anne Freeze, health agency, reported that the health agency will continue to immunize for H1N1 as the vaccine becomes available.

Under Administrative Communications Commissioner Miller submitted evidence that people have not been required to show proof that property taxes are paid before the county issues a vehicle license tag. Larry Wilson reported that he would look into the matter and

report back to the commission at the next meeting.

November 5, 2009

The meeting began with the Firefighters Local 83 presenting a \$1,000 check to the commissioners for the Community Foundation. These type of presentations are always happy occasions.

The treasurer's office took another hit today when the commission discussed the system being used for vehicle registration. According to law individuals must have property taxes paid before receiving a tag for their vehicle. Evidence was presented that tags were sold without checking that taxes were paid up. Larry Wilson claimed "human error" was the problem but the commissioners were skeptical. Commissioner Miller said "the problem appears to be systemic".

With an eye toward saving money the commissioners approved a contract to outsource COBRA benefits for Shawnee County and are planning a significant savings with a cafeteria plan switch from BCBS.

It should be noted that before the commissioners approve a contract for the lowest bid for inspection/overhaul of chiller and replacement of a cooling tower pump they requested that the county counselor include warranty language in the contract.

At the end of the meeting two individuals from East Topeka Senior Center pre-

sented a plea for volunteers for the Senior Companion Program. This observer has noted the commissioners view this as a very worthwhile program.

November 9, 2009

The county commissioners approved the reconciliation of bank statements for August to December 2008. Marti Leisinger of Audit/finance was assigned this task since the treasurer's office was having some difficulty. Larry Wilson requested a meeting with the commissioners, audit/finance, treasurer's office and information technology to discuss a plan for reconciling bank statements for 2009. The work session was set for Nov. 12 at 10:00.

Ken Keller of the ambulance service came before the commission to request a rate increase. He neglected to get approval from the advisory board so commissioners said do that first and come back. He will probably be back at the meeting on Nov. 19.

Anne Freeze of the health agency continues to update the commissioners on the distribution of H1N1 vaccine. The county is still receiving limited supplies of the vaccine and needs to follow up with the second shot for children under 9 years of age.

November 12, 2009

Jennifer Martin reported to the commissioners, at the

request of Commissioner Miller. Apparently, the Martins sold a vehicle in 2002. Every year since they purchased car tags with no difficulty. This year they were charged with late taxes on the vehicle that was sold in 2002. As the story progressed we found out how difficult it is to resolve an old error. Commissioner Miller asked that Mrs. Martin report to the commission so the lack of organization in the treasurer's office would be noted.

A contract for the renovation of the health agency annex on 10th St. was approved with the completion date specified. This project is to be completed with federal stimulus money and money from the health agency budget.

A work session to devise a plan for reconciling bank statements was held beginning at 10:00. Six issues were addressed. Deputy treasurer, Tammy Tefft and Marti Leisinger, audit / finance, agreed on proposed plans to complete bank reconciliations in a timely manner. Larry Wilson stated that overtime may be needed to catch up because they are now working on January 2009.

November 19, 2009

The Shawnee County Commission room was full at 9:00 AM. People were standing along the walls and in the reception area. This observer

learned that most of the people came for the public hearing scheduled for 10 AM.

The commissioners first approved the increase in rates requested by Ken Keller for ambulance services. Medicare payments have been reduced by 2% and the AMR base rates have not been raised in over 4 years.

The commissioners agreed that the county should pay for damage to a citizen's vehicle by paint sprayed on the pavement. It pays to present credible evidence.

The commissioners thanked members of Local 1294 (refuse and Recycling) for "reasonable" requests when a contract agreement was presented to the commission.

The next business of note was the discussion regarding the budget of the Register of Deeds. Marilyn Nichols claims she has run an efficient office with 5 employees but needs the option of promoting within that her current budget allows her to do. The commissioners seemed to view unused money as unneeded. No action was taken today.

This meeting ended at 9:50.

Public Hearing

This hearing was held to consider Home Rule Resolution No. 2009-4 authorizing a ballot question regarding con

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(Commission continued from page 7)

solidating the operations, procedure, and functions of the Shawnee County Treasurer's Office and the Shawnee County Audit/Finance Department. It was obvious from the crowd that the word had been spread that the election of county officials was threatened. Some came from a distance that required spending the night.

The commissioners heard speakers from Shawnee County first. The speakers ranged from elected officials (Marilyn Nichols) to private citizens (Joe Ledbetter). Those from out of town represented organizations such as President of the County Treasurer's Association as well as other elected officials, not necessarily county treasurers. Everyone that spoke opposed putting this question to the voters.

The hearing lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes.

November 23, 2009

Several weeks ago Heartland Visioning requested that the county become a "partner". Commissioner Miller was not comfortable with the wording of the proposal so the commission deferred the action until this morning. The proposal was amended so the county is not committed to responsibilities stated or committed to providing money. William Beteta told the commissioners he had no problem with

the changes.

H.R. Cook had a list of equipment he brought before the commission for replacement for the Expo-centre. The Expo-centre uses big equipment which carries a big price tag. The commissioners approved the request for over \$27,000.

The county prohibits its employees from using cell phones while driving, with the exception of law enforcement. Dave Sterbenz of emergency management thought his department should have the same exception. Only Commissioner Buhler agreed with him but her motion died for lack of a second and the request appears dead also.

November 30, 2009

Action was taken on 18 items today but two brought interest to the meeting. The first was a zoning change requested by LKQ Mid-America Auto Parts on property on SW Topeka Blvd close to 57th St.. If the change was granted the company will buy the property which will add 30 to 40 new jobs to their current 92 employees. Two complications arose. First the planning commission vote was split. They want assurance that this area will enhance the gateway to Topeka rather than a series of Auto graveyards. The second complication, was the time constraints. LKQ needed the zoning change before the end of the year. This is not enough time for a legal agreement to be prepared stipulating the property maintain an attractive appearance. After questions and discussion, Commissioners Buhler and Ensley voted to approve the zoning change.

The next item that raised the anguish in the room was the adjustment to the budget of the register of deeds. Marilyn Nichols had previ-

ously explained to the commissioners that although it may look as if she had extra money in her budget, she maintained enough money to be able to promote valuable employees. Commissioners Miller and Ensley both assured her she would be able to request money for such a purpose whenever the need arose. That seemed to be of small comfort. This motion was approved by 2 votes. Commissioner Buhler dissented.

December 7, 2009

The bulk of this meeting consisted of an explanation of the updated Shawnee County Flood Map by Barry Beagle of the planning department. When Mr. Beagle discovered that changes in the designations of flood zones were being "modernized" by FEMA he started investigating said changes. He reported that it is likely that high-risk flood zones in Shawnee County will increase from 4,800 to 8,600. Citizens will take notice because the law mandates that federally regulated or insured mortgage lenders require flood insurance for properties in high-risk flood zones. There will be public meetings and property owners may appeal. Mr. Beagle reported that current flood hazard data is out of date because water flow and drainage patterns have changed dramatically due to land use, erosion and natural forces. Commissioner Buhler indicated a special interest in the new flood maps because Rossville is susceptible to flooding. It will be interesting to see what areas of Topeka will be classified high-risk.

DALE DENNIS — By Grace L. Wilson

Robert Harder introduced the Dec. 1 Tuesday Topics speaker Dale Dennis, assistant commissioner of education for the state of Kansas, as one of the most respected civil servants in the state.

Dennis said that there will be no increase in the governor's budget for education next year, and we cannot even balance the budget without more revenue.

"I've never seen a time like this, not even close," Dennis said, about the financial situation. "All the rabbits have been pulled out of the hat." In the past, the state has even reported large cash balances, but recently the education department has told school districts that they needed to plan ahead for a budget crunch.

"We've spent \$400 million more than we took in," Dennis said. He said that the budget might be in better shape if the state had left taxes alone. "It's phenomenal all the tax cuts we've had. Something will have to be delayed."

We would have to go back to 1992 when per pupil expenditure was around \$3600 to be where we will be this year. This year will have less budgeted per student than last. It will be extremely difficult for school districts to figure out where to cut their budgets..

Educators want to keep the cuts as far away from the students as possible, but everything they do affects kids, Dennis said. He remembers a time when districts were begging for teachers, and there was a shortage of special education and science teachers. Not only will districts be cutting teachers to save on salaries, but bus drivers and cooks may have to look for other jobs, because they cannot live on a 20 percent cut.

Can we afford to pay teachers less? Academically, Kansas students usually rank in the top 10 states, whereas teacher pay in Kansas ranks 38th. Class sizes of 17 or 18 will not be possible anymore.

"We're loading them up," Dennis said. Even if a district could hire an extra teacher this year, they might have to fire them next year. In Kansas free lunches went up 13 percent. Even in Johnson County, people are losing their jobs.

"What would you cut?" Dennis said. Food and nutrition? Custodians? Buses? If some school districts did not transport, the students would not get to school. Sports, debate, theater, arts and music? It may be that kids stay in school because of these activities and the dropout rate would go up.

How about principals? Everyone knows what a good principal is worth, Dennis said. School districts are cutting assistant coaches and nurses. In one district, the parents wanted to pay for school nurses, but were told that they would have to raise enough for all schools, not just a selected few.

Dennis said we should look at the revenue lost through tax exemptions. There are so many tax exemptions (they are labeled alphabetically), that we are now going through the alphabet for the fourth time.

There is a bill that is going to be introduced in the legislature that 1) would stop granting any new tax exemptions, 2) sunset in 3 years, and 3) stop existing tax exemptions.

Joan Wagnon has said that if we had just left things alone in 1995, we would have \$16 billion now.

"Good schools drive economic development," Dennis said. "There is no objective study showing that keeping taxes low stimulates economic development." When people move to a community, one of the first things they check is the schools."

Dennis said that districts might get half their monetary allotment from the state for December and the other half would be a "miracle" if made by January 1. Many districts have spent down their emergency funds, and the education department may have to help out any district having trouble meeting its payroll.

Dennis said consolidation should be done for educational reasons, not to save money. In one case, there is one superintendent for two school districts. Forty superintendents have another role; one even drove a bus when a bus driver was sick.

We have two or three less school districts a year, but it is because enrollment is low enough that they cannot provide the academics that students need to meet higher education standards. At that point, the parents will advocate for it, so the state has been letting the local districts decide.

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
LOIS COX, VOTER EDITOR
910 SE 43RD STREET
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66609-1620**

I want to add my voice to yours by joining the League of Women Voters. I enclose

_____ \$53 for a 1 year Individual Membership.

_____ \$75 for a 1 year Household Membership.

_____ \$85 for a 1 year Sustaining Membership.

_____ \$25 for a 1 year Student (age 18) Membership.

_____ I am unable to join the League at this time, but enclosed is a tax-deductible
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Name _____

Address _____

Please make check payable to league of Women Voters Topeka Shawnee County and

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