

**EMPOWERING VOTERS
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE
CAPITOL
VOTER**

**MAY
2022**

IN THE MAY CAPITOL VOTER

- **President: Ensuring the Fundamental Right to Vote**
- **Book Discussion Titles for June and July**
- **Observer Corps Debrief at Central Park Pavilion**
- **In-Person Annual Meeting**
- **2022-2024 League Board Candidates**
- **Voter Services Gearing Up for Registration Drives**
- **Greening the Garden**
- **Forming New Membership Committee**

LWVLA CALENDAR

Wednesday, May 25, noon. LWVLA members invited to Observer Corps Debrief at covered pavilion next to Meridian Township offices. See article below for more info.

Tuesday, June 14, 10 am. Book Discussion Group: *Hurricane Lizards and Plastic Squid: The Fraught and Fascinating Biology of Climate Change*, by Thor Hanson. See article below for more info.

Tuesday July 12, 10 am. Book Discussion Group: *Halfway Home, Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration*, by Reuben Jonathan Miller. See below.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT Donna Mullins



This month's President's report is both an update and appeal. The League was founded on the principle that civic participation is necessary for a democracy to flourish. Thus, we are among the leaders in the Promote the Vote effort to make voting a fundamental right in Michigan. Additionally, the League supports reproductive rights for women. It stands for choice. Voting is our most important tool to guarantee choice.

Promote the Vote

We currently have 13 members circulating petitions to place the Promote the Vote constitutional amendment on the ballot. In addition, we have a few non-members who have joined us in this effort, including the members of Alpha Phi Alpha. They are an older organization than we are and were also born of the struggle for equal rights. We are proud to be allied with them!

The state effort has been effective, with a number of organizations working to collect petitions. (I know many of our members are active in Voters Not Politicians.) We are allies with all and in no way competitive. Our goal is to enable access to the ballot to all who are eligible to vote.

Whether you can get 6 or 600 signatures, we are happy to make it convenient for you to learn the process as well as pick up and return petitions. The adoption of this amendment will secure voting rights in Michigan. Our goal is to have the necessary signatures by the end of June. [Let me know](#) if you would like to help.

Reproductive Rights

This is from a recent LWVUS [statement](#): "Reproductive care is essential health care and a fundamental right that the Supreme Court is preparing to undermine. If this draft opinion holds, and overturns *Row v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, it not only strips women and pregnant people of their personal autonomy but opens the door to erode more fundamental rights. As an organization that believes in the power of women to create a more perfect democracy, we will fight to preserve the individual rights of women to make their own reproductive choices."

Here is the League's guidance regarding reproductive rights:

- Keep in mind that only the president or their representative can speak for the League. That means that you can say the League supports choice but need to keep the next bullet point in mind.
- There is a lot of passion surrounding this issue; be nonpartisan in your remarks.
- Encourage members to join protests, rallies, and events. The League is an ally in this fight.
- Acknowledge that this is hard on a personal level. Some people may not feel comfortable talking about it. We encourage League leaders to echo Dr. Turner's sentiment in the email she sent to all League members this week: *"I want to acknowledge the pain and fear that this news causes for so many. This very real threat to our reproductive rights puts people in danger, fuels already heightened anxiety, and looms as a dangerous degradation of personal civil liberties."*

Showing Up at Events

Verify the legitimacy of any event before you choose to partner or participate. **Make sure it is an appropriate event for a nonpartisan organization to join.**

- It's appropriate for participants to wear League gear at reproductive rights rallies.
- Stay safe! Refer to our [LWVUS protest safety guidance](#).
- If you become uncomfortable engaging with opposition protesters, connect with the organization that is leading the event.

Reproductive Rights Talking Points

- Abortion is still legal nationwide.
- This is a very scary time for women and all people who may become pregnant.
- For anyone who experiences pregnancy, our basic freedoms depend on our ability to control our reproductive health.
- Our reproductive choices impact our physical and psychological wellbeing, including the foods we eat, our financial resources, and our capacity to gain and maintain employment.
- Not only is the right to a safe and legal abortion a matter of personal freedom, it's also a major factor in the movements for racial and economic equality. Black women and all underserved communities already experience unfair barriers and limited access to adequate health care services.
- Protection for reproductive health decisions is a democracy issue—and specifically, it is a D.C. statehood issue. Because Washington, D.C. is not a state, Congress has the final say over the District's local laws. For decades, Congress has instituted laws that restrict access to reproductive health services, like abortion, within the boundaries of the District of Columbia.
- Generations before us have fought tirelessly to gain and protect the rights we have today. We will not back down. We are in a fight to make sure everyone has the power to control their own bodies, lives, and futures.
- We deserve elected officials—at all levels of government—and judges who believe in our right to privacy and choice. We'll keep fighting in every state in the nation.
- True democracy depends on equal rights for all people. Losing our right to reproductive choice would open the door to the loss of other freedoms like marriage equality, contraception, and gender-affirming care.
- It is critical that we show up and make our voices heard for reproductive choice.

The information on reproductive rights is the official position of the League. Here in the Lansing area our emphasis on ensuring that the fundamental right to vote is available to all Michigan citizens is the foundation of any strategy that would guarantee the right to reproductive health. We will surely not achieve the second without the first. We can do it if we do it

Together,
Donna

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

Donna Mullins

The Book Discussion Group meets on Zoom on the second Tuesday of the month. It's usually not an analytical conversation, rather a free-flowing response to the book. (Sometimes we even have to remind ourselves to get back to the topic at hand.)

June 14, 10-11:30 am, we'll be discussing *Hurricane Lizards and Plastic Squid: The Fraught and Fascinating Biology of Climate Change*,



by Thor Hanson (304 pp.). It's all about how climate change is driving evolution and how plants and animals adjust, evolve, and sometimes die out. A story of hope, resilience and risk.

July 12, 10-11:30 am, the group will talk about *Halfway Home, Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration*, by Reuben Jonathan Miller (352 pp.). The Chicago Cook County Jail chaplain and mass-incarceration sociologist examines the lifelong realities of a criminal record, demonstrating how America's justice system is less about rehabilitation and more about structured disenfranchisement.

We are hoping to have hybrid meetings soon to ensure accessibility as well as an opportunity to see each other in person. If you would like to attend [let Donna know](#).

OBSERVER CORPS **Valerie Lafferty, Chair**

In April the Observer Corps hosted Mayor Lori West from Galesburg, Michigan, who shared her experiences in running for office, advocating and leading for positive change. Our May Debrief will be a brown bag lunch gathering at noon on **Wednesday, May 25** at the covered pavilion area behind the Meridian Township offices off Marsh Road. All LWVLA members are invited to attend the lively and enjoyable conversation that ensues. Hope to see you then!

Check out the Observer Corps reports for April, shown below.

AN IN-PERSON ANNUAL MEETING!

On May 10 we resumed holding our annual meeting in person. Thanks are due to the organizing committee of Susan R. Chalgian, Elaine Fischhoff, Dorothy Engelman, Kate Lein, Lisa Moore, and Kathy Lovell. The business of the meeting was organized with the help of Camilla Davis, Cele Friestater, Barb Bidigare and Bob Miller. The considerable amount of work that took place before the meeting made it possible for all to have an enjoyable and relaxing evening.



Members approved several bylaw amendments which elevated several board positions to Vice President, clarified the use of co-chairs, and more fully dedicated our League to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness.

Our speaker, Tony Gant from Nation Outside, told us about his own experiences when he was released from prison after 20 years. We learned that voter registration is a way to welcome the formerly incarcerated back into the community. And we learned that there is much work to do in the area of housing and employment for people who have served a prison sentence. We intend that our connection will grow with Nation Outside. We are grateful for that opportunity!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

Approved Slate of Board Candidates for 2022-2024

Submitted by Nominating Committee:

Marilyn Wilson, Elaine Fischhoff, and Merry Jo Hill-Hernandez

Elected Officers through 2024

President: Donna Mullins

Secretary: Lynn Wilson

Vice-President for Voter Service: Joanne Winkelman

Vice-President for Observer Corps: Valerie Lafferty

Appointed Directors through 2024

Publicity: Kathy Lovell

Voter Editor: Ellen Link

Appointed Chairs through 2024

Education: Bettie Menchik

Environment Co-chairs: Elaine Fischhoff and Ellen Link

Event Coordinator: Elaine Fischhoff

Continuing Board Members through 2023

Officers

VP-Program: Susan Chalgian

Treasurer/Roster Manager: Barb Bidigare

Directors At Large

Development/Fund Raising: Kate Lein

Webmaster*: Lisa Moore

Parliamentarian/Government: Cele Friestater

Membership: Camilla Davis

Nominating Committee

Jacqueline Stewart, Chair

Melinda Frame

*Lisa Moore- The position is filled until the 2nd annual meeting after appointment-2023.

AND JUST LIKE THAT, ANOTHER BOARD OPENING...

Susan R. Chalgian has stepped down from the position of Vice-president for Program after organizing our return-to-normalcy annual meeting. We are grateful for Susan's work this last year. She, like so many of us, had to balance the needs of her family during a pandemic with LWVLA duties. She did so with grace.

Now we are looking for a person who might be interested in replacing her in that position. The VP for Program works with a committee to schedule programs throughout the year. Many members of the board are active on the committee, and often the events are

planned by the sponsoring committee. The VP for Program generally serves as the organizer for the annual meeting and any celebration connected with Equality Day. Whenever appropriate, the organization of events may include other community organizations with shared missions and values. It's a big job, but many hands make light work. (Experienced hands like Elaine Fischhoff make this less daunting than one might think.)

“Program” is bigger than lunches and informational forums. In the League, “program” refers to the positions we take after study. Our local League has not changed since May of 2013 and a few members are interested in looking into more local issues in depth in order to develop more robust local policies. The VP for Program would ensure that the process for developing local program positions follows League policy. Having a robust Observer Corps and stronger connections with community groups is leading us to consider new positions. While the VP for Program would not be responsible for their development, they would be connected to the process.

The Nominating Committee will be working to find a replacement, once the third member of their committee is appointed by the board. If you have any interest in this position, know someone who would do a good job or would like to learn more, [contact Donna](#).

VOTER SERVICES

Joanne Winkelman, Voter Services Director

The Voter Services Committee met on May 4 to discuss the upcoming elections in 2022. There are several primary races for the August election. Candidates will be notified to participate in the Vote 411.org questionnaires before absentee voting begins. No definite candidate forums are planned for the primary elections, but if there is interest in a primary race then a forum will be considered.

Judy Andre, Marty Couretas and Renee Swanson registered students at Waverly High School in conjunction with the MI Vote Matters High School Voter Registration Challenge on April 28. Thanks to all who volunteered. Although there were more volunteers than needed, please note there will be more opportunities to register voters. The Lansing City Clerk is planning registration drives at various locations this summer.

GREENING THE GARDEN

Ellen Link, EAG Co-chair

At long last, gardening season! Before you join the throngs of excited gardeners rushing to local nurseries to purchase plants and planting materials, there are a few things you might keep in mind by way of protecting the very nature you've waited all winter to enjoy.

Neonicotinoids, aka neonics: a class of neuro-active insecticides chemically similar to nicotine, these [chemicals](#) are



used in horticulture to prevent the proliferation of harmful pests (and protect profits). Absorbed by plants, they can be present in pollen and nectar. So while they are less toxic to humans, “Research... clearly shows how neonicotinoids are killing bees or changing their behaviors” ([Xerces Society](#)), hence their restricted use in Europe (and in Minnesota). What to do? Ask your favorite plant nursery if they or their providers use neonics (they may be clueless), or check out this [list](#) of pollinator-friendly companies; [Xerces](#) also provides consumer info.

Peat moss: Some of you may, like me, enjoy starting plants from seed. In the past I always used a wonderful commercial mix of peat moss and perlite for all my planting needs and plain peat for enriching garden patches. But alas, the word is out that the extraction of peat is a big no-no. Peatlands have historically served as “carbon sinks,” warehouses for large amounts of carbon dioxide—“the superhero of the natural world” according to wetlands scientist Christian Dunn (quoted in the [Washington Post](#)). The article goes on to say, “Peatlands are only 3 percent of the land surface but store as much as 30 percent of all the carbon locked in the soil. Release that, and the greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere will go kaboom...”! What to do? Consider using alternative planting mediums that are more sustainable though perhaps not as useful as peat, such as coconut coir (made from the husks), rice hulls, composted manure, or [PittMoss](#) (made from recycled paper); some may require the addition of nutrients. This dandy article from [Tree Hugger](#) has creative tips on meeting the challenge.

Fertilizers: Everyone, it seems, wants a lush green lawn, the kind seen in movies and magazines. But is the cost worth it? A little fertilizer can go a long way—meaning too much can result in health problems for you and your family and excess nitrates in your run-off that contribute to eutrophication of nearby bodies of water. When in doubt, go with organic. An excellent article from [Earth-Kind®](#) provides much useful information (even if it is from Texas) for adding the proper amount and type of nutrients to lawns, trees, shrubs, etc.

Herbicides & Pesticides: Despite many years of research and evidence on the toxicity of glyphosate, aka Roundup (think Agent Orange), its usefulness as a weed killer has protected its throne in the market. So remember, if you decide to use it, to shield your skin from contact. Thankfully, the current EPA was finally able to ban the use of [chlorpyrifos](#), a pesticide sold under various trade names (Lorsban, Dursban and others), which damages the developing brains of children and is harmful to everyone. It would be impossible to list all the dangerous chemicals that we have allowed to be used on our fruits, vegetables, flowers, and so on, but if you’re interested in learning more this [website](#) is a good place to start.

So: Ready to go out and garden? Enjoy the great outdoors—but watch out for the poison ivy, ticks, mosquitoes, wasps...

ONE THING

Now that the weather is warmer, put up a clothesline and hang out your laundry to dry.

LWVLA MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE FORMING

Camilla Davis, Membership Director

Now that we're having more opportunities to meet in person, LWVLA is again in need of a Membership Committee.

Members of this committee will:

- Welcome new members to our League by making personal contacts.
- Help new members with getting connected to League activities.
- Plan events for new members.
- Plan events for all members with the goal of strengthening relationships and emphasizing inclusivity.
- Develop strategies to keep and involve members.
- Encourage applying the DEI lens to all League activities.



If you'd like to be involved in strengthening and growing LWVLA, contact [Camilla Davis](#), Membership Director, or call 517-668-6156.

Need a Professional-looking LWV Name Badge?

A professional-looking magnetized League name badge can be ordered directly from LWVMI's supplier, Midwest Graphics in Dexter, Michigan, which has LWV artwork and size specifications. The cost is approximately \$15, plus shipping. To order, email [Adam Hernandez](#), identify yourself as a LWV member and provide the name you want to appear on the badge. **NOTE:** You can save shipping costs by sending a group order. If you'd like to be part of the group, contact [Camilla Davis](#).

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Ciera Borden, Spartan League Student Member
Hannah Richardson, Spartan League Student Member

APRIL OBSERVER CORPS REPORTS

Clinton County - Judge Shannon Schlegel of the 29th Circuit Court gave a report to the Board of Commissioners. Among other things, she described the "Journey Court" which deals with defendants who have been arrested for a serious offense but have substance abuse or mental issues. Instead of jail time they can be put in a special probation program, where they must appear weekly before the Judge. This program is being supported by a grant from the Michigan Supreme Court.

This meeting was unusually long, with recognition of six retirements of County employees, including the Sheriff, Deputy Sheriff and two other members of the Sheriff's Department. In addition to the report from Judge Shannon, there were reports from Ms. Davis of the Community Mental Health Council and Bob Trezise of the Lansing Area Economic Partnership. 2021 was a good year for the Lansing Area economy, with several new businesses moving to the area. But Mr. Trezise also warned of potential future problems with shortage of skilled labor, affordable housing, transportation and effects on the environment. A zoning issue was also on the agenda concerning an application for a

special land use permit for an “events barn” on an agricultural property. After lengthy negotiations by the applicant with the County Planning Commission, the application was approved.

Ingham County Commissioners - Housing: The commission approved a Resolution to Utilize \$9 Million in American Rescue Plan Funds For Affordable Housing Opportunities through the Ingham County Housing Trust Fund. *Juvenile Justice:* Approved Resolution to Submit to the Electorate a Juvenile Justice Millage Renewal and Restoration Question (current mileage expired last year). *Jails:* Approved Resolution to Authorize the Controller/Administrator to Immediately Pursue a Jail/Medical Provider and to Temporarily Fill Vacancies. A backlog in medical care, identified as an emergency/crisis, due to staff shortage was noted at the county jail and was thoroughly discussed at the April 14 Law and Courts Committee meeting. Because of the urgency of the problem, the commissioners authorized the sheriff, controller and health officer to work to fix the immediate need while a longer-term fix is pursued with a Request for Proposals and contract. There was some concern that this would lead to privatization/for-profit, which at least some want to avoid. Friendly atmosphere.

Meridian Township Trustees - The Township will be making a donation to Small Talk to help people who are survivors of sexual assault and children who have survived domestic violence or crime.

In regard to the extensive and controversial Daniels Drain scope and assessment, Meridian Township did an amazing job of providing information to answer all of the public’s questions and concerns, including the government system of payment, current assessments, and any changes. An engineer gave the history of the drain and a detailed explanation of the current problems and solutions. Drainage and flooding in our area are huge issues now and will be in the future. The treasurer commented that the information was outstanding and that he felt if residents had heard it before receiving their bills, they would have been less angry. He was also concerned that the information was given so late in the evening. The speaker from Ingham Co. Drainage explained the awkwardness of Chapter 20 Drains. There are many reasons but the main one is that the assessments come late, after the project is started, which is unsettling for many homeowners. The county is working to change all drains from this payment system. He also explained that this drainage system will help with the flooding at Grand River and Okemos Rds. Again, the treasurer questioned the cost of the drain and felt that Ingham Co. could have done a better job of keeping costs down. The speaker (Pat Lindemann's stand-in) explained that Ingham Co. was doing outstanding work with drainage and water quality.

Meridian Township Trustees meet twice a month. On the second meeting, it started an hour earlier than usual. At least one citizen was surprised, as was I; the time change was not mentioned at the previous meeting. The topic was a discussion by the board of the American Rescue Act and what to do with the money.

Meridian Township Food to Composting Continual Study Group (F-C) held a food audit at the Williamston Middle School on Earth Day by invitation of the Director of Nutrition, who has joint duties between Williamston and Haslett school systems. The F-C Group worked with lunch and janitorial staff and the building principal to separate organic from inorganic materials at the end of their 3 lunch seatings. The inorganic waste can be

picked up separately by a local service (My Green Michigan) to be composted at Hammond Farms (Holt location), which allows the inorganic trash to be picked up less frequently. My Green Michigan was on hand to share teaching materials about composting. The exercise was easy to do. Some group (student council or earth club, etc.) would need to monitor the slight change in lunch procedure to make the separation a habit. Additionally, the F-C also reached out to 8 grocers in the township to ask about separating their waste for disposal. The larger chain grocers are already using organic pick-up services but only for produce, not for their floral, third-party bakery, garden products or paper. The smaller grocers are not separating so information was offered about the Lansing area's local service, My Green Michigan. The F-C Group would be glad to share information with other greater Lansing locations that may be interested. (Contact laffertypllc@gmail.com)

Williamstown Township Trustees - The board approved a contract with BS&A Community Development Software for services that will allow online application for most building permits and burn permits. They approved a contract with Smart Offices to install streaming services for meetings with eventual remote participation capability. The board also approved a 30% match on funding to gain a recycling grant. Plans are to make expanded recycling services available to residents. There was discussion about a proposed \$65 permit charge for residents on non-farm parcels having farm animals. One trustee thought the cost too high. It was decided to research fees charged by other townships and revisit the issue next month.

Changes created by the new redistricting were explained by Clerk Cleveland. District #1 is now residents south of Sherwood Rd., who will vote at St. Katherine's Church, and District #2 is residents north of Sherwood Rd., who will vote at the township hall. A link to a broadband survey for Ingham County residents is posted on the website to help secure infrastructure dollars for communities to expand broadband services to those underserved. Residents are being encouraged to take the survey. Starting last month, all documents for meetings are posted online ahead of the meeting.

City of East Lansing - During public comments, representatives from the police and fire departments and several City employees spoke regarding disappointment at not having received hazard pay during the COVID shutdown. Unlike other city employees, they were not allowed to work from home and were asking for some of the ARPA money related to hazard pay. It was unclear what the outcome of this request will be. Other topics covered included a reminder of upcoming nominations for Crystal Awards for unsung heroes, reopening of the aquatic center, an update that it is no longer requiring masks in public meetings, rezoning of properties on Lake Lansing Road, and new regulatory requirements for food trucks. The council approved a resolution to allocate a portion of the city's ARPA funding for multiple capital improvement-related projects for retention ponds and drains, sidewalks, solar panels on public works, the East Lansing Public Library and its services, renovations to the third floor of Hannah Community Center, and renovations to the fire station and parking facilities.

Further discussion was related to special use plans for approval of fraternities and sororities off campus; a suggestion was made to have a moratorium at this time while clarification is made with the university. Other items included recognition of Autism Awareness Month and Fair Housing Month, a public hearing for the fiscal year 2023

budget and property tax rate, street closures for the East Lansing Art Festival, parking facility repairs, community development block grants, and approval of a special use permit from a marijuana retailer at the former Sawyers Pontiac dealership. The volume of work the council members address continues to impress, both in the meetings and in their preparations. Generally, the atmosphere was collegial, supportive and inclusive.

Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission - The Redistricting Commission has completed its task successfully, that is, they have drawn maps which have thus far passed scrutiny with the courts. The commission's work has been admired by other states who are in the process of creating redistricting commissions or wish they were. The goal was fair maps and they have achieved this to the best of their ability. Two lawsuits are still outstanding, both in Federal Court, but the court has not issued an injunction so the maps are on track to be used in the Fall of 2022. The discussion reflected the commission's wish to be transparent. They voted to make all the documents requested by FOIAs available to the public by posting them on the commission website (including some that were requested by Commissioner Wagner, who sued the commission over not getting the documents fast enough—a result of not having enough staff to handle FOIAs). They also voted to ask for an independent financial audit. They are confident they have spent the money from the Michigan Legislature wisely, and they are going to have to ask for more because they are about \$1million in the red (probably because they asked for too little in the first place, because this is the first time we have had an Independent Citizens' Redistricting Commission in Michigan and they did not know what to expect, particularly with litigation costs). A final report, including dissenting reports, will be published soon, after review by lawyers (as well as a video entitled "Lessons Learned" to help the next Commission.)

OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK

All committees would welcome new members. Contact the chairs for more information.

VOTER SERVICE: Contact [Joanne Winkelman](#).

K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE: Contact [Bettie Menchik](#).

ENVIRONMENT ADVOCACY GROUP: Contact [Ellen Link](#) or [Elaine Fischhoff](#).