



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF EVANSTON

THE INTERCOM

NOVEMBER 2011

Meaningful Collaboration: Evanston & North Shore Leagues Work Together On the National LWV Education Study

— by Cheryl Wollin

Over the summer and fall, local leagues throughout the country focused on a national study of **The Role of the Federal Government In Education**. The purpose of the study was to develop a League position to enable us to advocate on upcoming legislation, especially the reauthorization of NCLB (No Child Left Behind). The two major foci of the study were Funding/Equity and Common Core Standards/Assessment. A national team developed fifteen consensus questions; every local league was to hold informational meetings and reach consensus on these same questions. To improve our communication and study, Evanston partnered with the Glenview, Glencoe, and Winnetka/Northfield/Kenilworth leagues. Several meetings were held by the planning group who sought speakers with expertise, chose venues, and decided which materials needed to be printed for our members. The education study team from Evanston included Pat Aaron, Ruth Belzer, Kate Julian, Melissa Leasia, Cate Whitcomb, and Cheryl Wollin. Here is a summary of the events organized and presented by the team:



Ralph Martire and Madelyn James. The forum was held in the New Trier West board room, and they generously videotaped the entire program. (We have forwarded the DVD - 129 minutes - to the community cable station in Evanston, but have not been given a broadcast date yet.) It was a wide-ranging, provocative and productive evening discussion.

Mr. Martire is the Executive Director of the *Center for Tax and Budget Accountability*. He is such a knowledgeable speaker on funding issues that he was in much demand by leagues around the state. His expert background on the state budget was bolstered by a PowerPoint presentation packed with graphs, statistics, and charts. The state funds about 28% of education costs, the federal government funds 10% and the rest comes from property taxes. Therein lies the inequity. Wealthier districts can spend more per pupil, pay more for quality teachers, and afford more resources. There has also been a 20% increase in poverty in Illinois (as of the 2008-09 school year). That translates into about 60,000 more people living below the poverty level of \$22,350 for a family of four. Martire noted that the “minimum

\$ per child times the multiplier of need” means that Illinois needs to fix state policies. We cannot realistically expect the federal government to do more financially. Competitive grants in RttT (Race to the Top) for example, do not help needy schools who do not have grant writers—or the resources to hire them. Another point is that the U.S. spending on education is often compared [favorably] to that of other countries, but Martire noted that European countries do not include health care costs in their teacher salaries, since most have socialized medicine.

Madelyn James, from *Voices for Illinois Children*, spoke on the concerns about Early Childhood Education, and how vital it is to academic and social success. Lest we think that the North Shore is immune to the concerns of poverty, she pointed out that in the 9th

Congressional District, there are 27,330 children facing food insecurity. In the 10th Cong. District, it's 34,550. These children are at risk, and yet state aid is at its lowest level since 2007. Vast research proves that early intervention helps prepare these children for school success. Early Head Start programs have been threatened by federal budget cuts regardless of their effectiveness. An interesting side point: she noted that Colorado predicts its jail capacity needs by the third grade reading level of its students and high school graduation rates.

A second forum, held at the Takiff Center in Glencoe, featured **Dr. John Wick**. An emeritus professor at Northwestern, Dr. Wick is a psychometrician who has done a number of longitudinal studies on two national standardized testing programs. His observations on the effectiveness of testing, as well as how assessments should be evaluated, were riveting. The goal is to maximize the performance level of each and every child to the best of their potential. It must start in K-8. Testing is a chance to “show ‘em you know.” It is not a teacher's test. Teachers should press students “as hard as you can,” but compare a student's progress to him/herself. The standards set by NCLB are minimum competency levels. So far only math and reading have common core standards, and other fields must articulate them. The local district is where the authority should rest. Dr. Wick's warning: Don't trust middle management to do anything; their fear of being held accountable for a mistake prevents them from taking action.

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President's Letter

This has been a very beautiful autumn, filled with stunning displays of foliage that I'm beginning to appreciate even more as I am out and about. Our League had yet another full season of programming (still in progress as I write this) that has been informative and rich in content. If you were able to attend the general information sessions preparing League members for their examination of the LWWUS national education study on September 26 and October 6 in Northfield and Glencoe respectively, you were enriched by presentations by Ralph Martire and Madelyn James who spoke about funding and equity for early childhood education and Dr. John Wick who shared his expertise on common core standards and assessments. On October 13, we invited Dr. Eric Witherspoon (Superintendent, District 202) and Dr. Hardy Murphy (Superintendent, District 65) to answer the LWWUS national study's consensus questions providing a birds-eye view of how these issues impact Evanston schools. Finally, on Oct. 18-19 the consensus meetings were held in Northfield and North Shore league representatives presented further information that allowed those present to go into breakout sessions and review the consensus questions under consideration.

We would have been unable to provide such a slate of programs on the education study on very short notice without a very dedicated team of League members including Cheryl Wollin, Pat Aaron, Kate Julian, Ruth Belzer, Cate Whitcomb, and Melissa Leasia. This group also collaborated with other North Shore leagues in preparing for the consensus meetings.

Kate Julian volunteered immediately on very short notice when I asked her to represent the League at a meeting of state legislators, school administrators, and community groups on November 3. (For more about the education study, see Cheryl Wollin's report on Page 1.)

You'll also note in this issue that the 2011 LWVE/District 65 U.S. Constitution Contest is now in full swing and the call for judges is open to all League members. Don't miss the opportunity to give back to our 7th grade students while assisting in the creation of one of the best contests ever.

In October an unusual opportunity fell into the lap of Melissa Leasia when after surprisingly finding a retirement home in Colorado, she and her husband Todd (and Skipper) were able to quickly sell their home here in Evanston and relocate to Colorado—we will deeply miss her spirit and her many contributions to the League over the last few years. Kim Hoopingartner has assumed the responsibilities for coordinating the articles for *The Intercom*.

During this season of gratitude and appreciation, I continue to express my deepest thanks for the outstanding contributions of the board of directors and I am extremely grateful to every member of our League for your participation in League activities.

Warmest wishes for the holiday season,

Susan



League of Women Voters of Evanston

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THE INTERCOM

November 2011

THE INTERCOM is the newsletter of the
League of Women Voters® of Evanston

LWV Cook County Report: Forest Preserve District Overview & County Budget Update

– by *Pris Mims*

The Cook County League's October 25 Lunch & Learn program featured Arnold Randall, general superintendent of the Cook County Forest Preserve District. Founded in 1914, the Forest Preserve is the oldest and largest such district in the United States, comprising 68,000 acres and 11% of the land within Cook County. (In contrast, the Chicago Park District has 5,700 acres.) The vast majority of the FP's holdings are in the suburbs and, Supt. Randall acknowledged, are not easy to access without driving. He is starting to work with PACE, Metra, and the CTA to offer public transportation options.



Supt. Randall provided details on what the FP has to offer, including woodlands, savannas, tallgrass prairies, native wetlands, 22 nature preserves, camping grounds, 6 nature centers, 40 managed lakes and ponds, 7 major waterways for canoeing and kayaking, 3 aquatic centers, 10 golf courses, 11 boat ramps, 5 snow mobile areas, 9 model airplane flying fields, 4 model boat areas, designated sledding hills, and 263 picnic groves. These last are the way the Forest Preserve touches the most people today. And, oh yes, Brookfield Zoo and the Chicago Botanic Garden come under the Forest Preserve; in fact, one-half of the FP's \$200 million budget goes to support these two resources.

Although the Forest Preserve is a separate taxing body, the Cook County President and Board of Commissioners serve in the same roles for the Forest Preserve. Supt. Randall was appointed by President Preckwinkle in Dec. 2010 and soon initiated a desk audit. All 450 full time employees were interviewed. A report was recently issued that contained 118 recommendations, some district-wide and some department-specific. The general theme of most of these was the need for more accountability. There were no job descriptions and no employee evaluations. Supt. Randall is instituting a number of changes to address this report, including regular staff meetings, employee training, and a new automated time-keeping system. The good news is that the FP is in fairly good shape financially and there are no projected layoffs. Also, Supt. Randall says that this government entity is small enough that it can be turned around quickly.

Commissioner Visits and Cook County Budget Update:

Representatives from LWV Cook County and local Leagues met with 10 of the 17 Cook County Commissioners prior to the start of the hearings on the proposed 2012 budget. Chief of Staff Kurt Summers, along with the Chief Financial Officer and Budget Director, provided an overview of how the \$315 million projected shortfall for the 2012 fiscal year can be eliminated through:

- proposed structural changes including reductions in staff by over 1,000, reducing the jail population by utilizing more electronic monitoring, reducing the population of the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center by using alternatives to detention, and consolidating the weekend bond courts to one location at 26th and California
- proposed expenditure reductions by utilizing a "managed competition process" for custodial services and using snow removal, which will allow more snow plows on the roads
- proposed reduction in the subsidy to the Health & Hospitals System which is not supposed to reduce patient care
- a proposal to leverage the Motor Fuel Tax revenue to issue bonds
- proposed expansion of the tax on cigarettes to encompass other tobacco products, such as loose tobacco
- proposed increase of the use tax rate (applies to the sale of title property such as cars, boats) by 0.25%
- proposed 50% increase in the alcohol tax rate
- proposed fees for parking at county parking facilities
- proposal to encourage unincorporated areas to either be annexed or pay additional charges to cover the incremental costs for the Sheriff to provide policing services
- a proposed amusement tax on video and similar machines
- a proposal to consolidate the weekend bond court to 26th and California

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Get Involved In New League Studies

– by Betty Hayford

Two new study items on issues of local interest and impact are on the League docket. An effective cure for the winter doldrums is to exercise your brain by joining a League study committee.



Privatization: The national League of Women Voters is asking local leagues to participate in a study on privatization during the winter and spring of 2012. This comes at a good time for the LWV Evanston because of the discussions on privatization that have taken place during the current Evanston budget process. In the past few months, the City Manager and City Council have raised possibilities of outsourcing Evanston city services and have been challenged by city employees, who cite the advantages of a dedicated city work force. Nearby states have engaged in fierce battles over best approaches to providing state and municipal services. Evanston residents would benefit by a League effort to carefully review the proposed goals and potential community impact of transferring

government services or functions to the private sector.

Members of the local government group who regularly observe City Council meetings have already expressed interest in investigating the conflicting claims related to privatization and the possible impact on quality of life issue in Evanston. Materials on the history and regulations related to privatization are available on the LWVUS web site and will be available as LWVE undertakes this effort. All LWVE members are encouraged to get involved, and should contact Susan Black or other Board members if they are interested.

School Consolidation: Dialogue in the community has started on the topic of consolidating School Districts 65 and 202 and the LWVE board feels it is essential to take a serious look at the issues involved and the impact on the quality of education in Evanston. If you would be interested in participating in this effort, please email Susan Black at seblack451@gmail.com.

Education Study *continued from page 1*

In order to get a local perspective on the role of the federal government in education, we invited District 65 Superintendent **Dr. Hardy Murphy** and District 202 Superintendent **Dr. Eric Witherspoon** to speak at an Evanston LWV luncheon. Provided with the consensus questions beforehand, they had an opportunity to focus on our study specifically. Both speakers presented articulate and fact-filled overviews on the status of Evanston schools and the federal dollars involved. The audience of about 35 Evanston LWV members appreciated the openness and honesty of the superintendents' perspectives.

Even though federal funds are limited, both men stressed the need for national standards to ensure that all states reach minimum standards. Forty-eight states have adopted the Common Core Standards (only Alaska and Texas have not). They noted that Evanston had made progress in achievement and high school graduation rates, but that there is still a need to reach all segments of the population to bolster academic progress.

Common Core Standards and Assessment: Members of the Glenview and Winnetka/Northfield/Kenilworth leagues presented an evening panel on this section of the study, covering nine consensus questions. The structure of each of the consensus study meetings was an informational presentation, followed by breakout sessions for each local league to come to consensus.

Some questions required a ranking of priorities if answered in the affirmative. The panelists introduced the first three general consensus questions, provided a short history of the role of the federal government in education, and a brief overview of the state and national LWV positions. Then they explored the real "meat" of what is a common core standard, and how a school should be

assessed to measure success. Should a national assessment aligned with common core standards be mandated? How should results be communicated to parents, teachers, students, and the community? Are sanctions to poor performing schools effective?

Funding and Equity Issues: The very next afternoon, panelists from Evanston and Glencoe addressed questions ten through fifteen which centered on funding and equity (or inequity!) including early childhood education. There was a brief review of the first three questions, the history of federal involvement, and state and national positions on education, before the financial perspectives were addressed. There was a nationally produced Power Point used as a background for our presentation. (Available on the LWVUS site). Discussion revolved around community issues—housing, hunger, health care, and crime—in addition to school facilities, quality of teachers, and available resources. The difference in categorical grants for special populations (the disabled and disadvantaged) and general grants to schools was discussed. Should ESEA funds be targeted?

Results: The Evanston education study group met again to summarize the results of our two day consensus meetings. The fifteen questions required a multiple choice answer. Evanstonians are not known for answering just yes or no! What seemed like easy questions were often controversial. Sometimes the wording of the questions from the national LWV was ambiguous or misleading to some responders. Taking all that into consideration, we added some brief comments/explanations to our report.

Kate Julian presented our report to the Evanston LWV Board on November 10. It will be sent to the national LWV by November 30. Then the national committee will combine the results nationwide and issue a recommendation for a position to the LWVUS Board this spring.

Do You Know Someone at Risk of Foreclosure? Interfaith Housing Center Can Help!

Using Cook County funds, The Chicago Community Trust awarded a \$52,500 outreach grant to the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs to spread the word face-to-face and door-to-door about the Circuit Court of Cook County Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program.



The Interfaith Housing Center will serve the hardest hit northern suburbs of Evanston, Glenview, Lincolnwood, Morton Grove, Niles, Northbrook, Park Ridge, Skokie and Wilmette as well as its home base, Winnetka. In 2010, 2,444 homeowners in these ten suburbs combined received foreclosure notices, a 652% increase over 2005. Interfaith outreach workers will also be reaching out to homeowners in the contiguous Chicago neighborhoods of Rogers Park and West Ridge.

The foreclosure mediation program provides free housing counseling and legal services to Cook County homeowners

and families in foreclosure. The program is aimed at helping homeowners resolve their mortgage cases in the most timely and respectful manner possible.

The Interfaith Housing Center is a HUD-certified housing counseling agency that provides foreclosure prevention and fair housing counseling in

Polish, Russian, and Spanish as well as English.

"In a region where more than 8 out of 10 homes are owner-occupied, foreclosures have an enormous impact on the families of this region," says Gail Schechter, Executive Director of the Interfaith Housing Center. ***"As an organization that is committed to healthy, diverse, and integrated communities, we are thrilled to have the tools to reach out and empower homeowners and renters alike to secure their housing."*** Interfaith is among 10 Cook County organizations to receive outreach grants from the Trust.

To participate in the mediation program, you must be a resident of Cook County who has received a foreclosure summons.

Call the toll free help line at **877-895-2444** or request an appointment on-line at **www.CookCountyForeclosureHelp.org**

LWV Cook County Report

continued from page 3

While the entire proposed budget is available online on the County's web site **www.cookcountyil.gov**, there is also a 12 page "Resident's Guide" to the budget that provides an overview and can be viewed or downloaded.

Cook County League observers are attending most of the meetings of the Board's Finance Committee. The Finance Committee's schedule anticipates that the budget, as may be amended, will be approved by November 18. This would mean that for the first time in a number of years, the budget will be approved prior to the start of the fiscal year on December 1.

Keep tabs on the budget process with the League's Observer Blog **www.cookcounty.il.lwvnet.org**

You can also sign up on the blog page to receive e-mail alerts whenever there is a new posting to the blog.

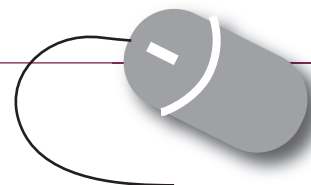
Membership Report

A warm welcome to these new members of the

League of Women Voters of Evanston:

**Julianne Dieterich
Margaret Goldstein
Robert Rogers
Gail West**

Reminder: Be sure to report any change in your email address to Membership VP Cate Whitcomb, to ensure timely delivery of eNews from the state & national LWV.



2011-2012 LWVE Calendar At A Glance

2011 Events

Thursday, December 8 -- 7:00 pm
LWVE Board of Directors Meeting
James L. King Home 1555 Oak Ave, Evanston

2012 Events

Monday, January 9 -- 12 noon
League Luncheon
Gio Restaurant 1631 Chicago Ave, Evanston
Speaker: **Jim Kenney, Common Cause**
Topic: Outlook for the 2012 General Election—Cost \$20

Friday, January 20 -- 7:00 pm
Constitution Contest Awards Ceremony
Joseph Hill District 65 Administrative Center
1500 McDaniel in Evanston

SAVE THE DATE

LWVIL's Issues Briefing

Saturday, January 28

Information on workshops and sign-up will be in the upcoming **LWVIL Voter** coming out in mid-December

Thursday, February 2 -- 7:00 pm
New Member Welcoming Party
John Evans Alumni Center
1800 Sheridan Road (at Clark Street)
This event is open to all members.
Wine & cheese will be served.

Wednesday, February 23 -- 12 noon
League Luncheon
Gio Restaurant 1631 Chicago Ave, Evanston
Speaker: **Sacella Smith, Youth Job Center of Evanston**
Cost \$20

Coming in March

Speaker: **Professor Elizabeth Kelly, DePaul University**
Date & location TBA

Tuesday, April 17
Wind Farms and Green Buildings
Speaker: **Nate Kipnis**
Time & location TBA

All programs are free unless otherwise noted.

For more information call 847-866-7844
or visit **Calendar Updates** at: www.lwve.org



League of Women Voters of Evanston
presents

2011 Constitution Contest

Your RIGHTS, Your REASONS

Friday, January 20th

Exposition: 6:30 to 7:00 pm

Awards Ceremony: 7:00 to 8:00 pm

Joseph E. Hill Education Center
1500 Mc Daniel Avenue in Evanston

To watch the highlights from last year's contest
visit us on Youtube at:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qk_MQ8bS4_s

Our Constitution Contest Needs Judges!

Since 2008 the Evanston League has hosted the annual **Your Rights, Your Reasons Constitution Contest**. Every 7th Grade student is invited to submit a written project, a visual art project or a performance. League members and leaders in the community spend hours judging amazing works of sculpture, essays, poetry and watching interpretive dance and rap groups expound on the importance of the United States Constitution.

WE NEED LEAGUERS TO BE JUDGES!

If you are interested in judging the contest this year please contact **Michelle Jordan 847-425-1985**. Like last year, we will be reading essays at my house. Come nosh on way too many carbs, read essays and catch up with your League buddies!

— by Michelle Jordan

National League Stands Up for Voting Rights

LWWUS President Elizabeth MacNamara recently spoke at a forum hosted by Cong. John Conyers on the topic, "Excluded From Democracy: The Impact of Recent State Voting Changes." Her testimony reminds us all of why we are League members. A brief excerpt follows. To read the full statement, go to:

<http://www.lww.org/AM/Template.cfm?Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=18022>

"The League has been fighting for equal access to the polls since our inception 91 years ago, when our organization was formed by those who successfully fought to gain the right to vote for women. This year the League actively opposed voter suppression legislation in 21 states – we were successful in protecting the vote in 13 of those states but the remaining states did create new and in some cases insurmountable barriers to the polls.

"Today we are experiencing an unprecedented attack on voting rights. This assault on voters is sweeping across the country, state by state, and is one of the greatest

self-inflicted threats to our democracy – our way of governing – in our lifetimes. These new laws threaten to silence the voices of those least heard and rarely listened to in this country – the poor, the elderly, racial and ethnic minorities, the young and the differently abled. These new laws require photo ID and or proof of citizenship in order to vote, they restrict third party voter registration drives, decrease early voting and eliminate Election Day registration."



Mission Statement

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

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**Congratulations
and Best Wishes to
Melissa Leasia
in Colorado!
You've Been A
Shining Star in Evanston!**

Volunteer Opportunities

Your City Needs You! Many Ways to Serve.



League members are no strangers to civic engagement — it's what we do. But beyond our involvement in the League, we can support the City through volunteer opportunities now conveniently posted on the City's website. From being a greeter at the Civic Center, to helping with the Comprehensive Plan Review, to lending a hand at the library, there are myriad opportunities to be of service.

To learn more, visit the City of Evanston website:
cityofevanston.org/resident/volunteer or call: 847-448-8266

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Observers Summary

– by Jan Otwell

League observers are our “eyes and ears” at the City Council and its standing committees, which set policy and direction for the City. If you’d like to learn the nitty-gritty of local government, being an observer is a great way to start. Call Jessica Feldman, Observer Chair, at 847-864-2199 for more information. Here’s a summary of what happened since the last Intercom:

Budget Preparation: During the fall, the City Council took on the consideration of numerous and varied topics, but two issues dominated: township governance and the city budget.

Dissolution of the Township: With the City of Evanston and the Township of Evanston having the same boundaries, aldermen are coming closer to an effort to dissolve the Township. In a 5 to 4 vote at the Oct. 26 Council meeting, aldermen, acting as Township Trustees, requested that the City Attorney draft language for a possible referendum to be placed on the ballot for the primary election next March. In a long discussion preceding the vote, the Trustees considered how the Township’s two main functions, Township Assessor and the provision of General Assistance, could be transferred and what savings could be realized by combining the two. The Trustees decided the functions of the Assessor’s office could be transferred to either the City or the County, but General Assistance was a more difficult decision. Trustees tried to determine what kind of a plan would be available to take care of the nearly 100 needy citizens whose General Assistance is administered by the Township. Lack of such a plan was part of the reasoning of Trustees Braithwaite, Wynne, Wilson and Holmes in voting no. Yes votes were Trustees Fiske, Tendam, Grover, Rainey and Burrus. Dissolution is a complex issue having to satisfy requirements in the Illinois Constitution, the Township Code and local regulations, some of which appear to contradict each other.

The 2012 Budget: Faced with persistent income restraints, staff and aldermen are wrestling with matchups between resources and spending. The City Manager has proposed a nearly 8% increase in the property tax. By law the Council must have the budget finalized by the end of this calendar year. As this issue of the Intercom went into production, the schedule called for a preliminary tax levy estimate to be delivered on Wednesday, Nov. 16. If needed, the Council will meet for a budget discussion Monday, Nov. 28. Adoption of the 2012 budget and tax levy is set for Monday, Dec. 12.

Robert Crown RFP: Having determined last year that three firms are qualified to bid on the replacement of

Robert Crown Center, the Council was prepared to issue Requests for Proposal (RFPs) to those firms for the design, financing, construction and operation of the Center. Plans call for three ice rinks, a community gymnasium, and space for recreation programs and child care. Mention was made of space for a library, which aldermen felt may no longer be desired. However, the possibility of adding space for baseball and soccer practice was discussed, so the City will offer the firms the possibility of adding this to their proposals.

311 Call Center: The 311 Call Center, for non-emergency calls, has been operational since 3/1/11. During that time it has handled some 72,000 calls, 12,000 of which have been service requests: missed recycling, missed trash pick-up, and missed special pick-ups. 5,000 additional calls were about graffiti. Other calls ranged over a number of different issues, a major one being downed or damaged trees from last summer’s storms. A new improvement: if a citizen calls 311 for a staff person, the caller is connected directly, which saves an immense amount of time. The Call Center has not added to the budget; costs are covered by the elimination of 8 staff positions.

Central Street Planned Development: Aldermen approved 8-1 a proposal for an 80-unit rental development at 1700-1722 Central Street, the site of the former Evanston Theater complex. The site had been vacant for four years because a condo development failed when the market collapsed. A similar project has been completed west of the tracks and is doing well, prompting aldermen to feel this project at 1700-1722 will provide a needed boost for that area. Concern was expressed about the number of parking spaces, but some aldermen felt that since the area is well served by public transportation, having fewer parking spaces would discourage dependence on cars.

Short Takes: Eighteen new bus shelters are planned and their locations were selected by aldermen; none is in the downtown area. Advertising will be a main source of revenue for the shelters.

Aldermen approved the first phase of using digital cameras to read license plate violations starting with parking enforcement.

Aldermen have approved three solar canopy and charging stations, two in city parking lots and a third in a location to be selected in south Evanston. **Two amendments were passed** to the City regulations on dangerous dogs, which would provide due process for owners whose dogs were deemed dangerous.

The proposed Bag Tax on plastic and paper shopping bags was dropped, amid criticism of the Environment Board for not taking up the issue with business owners before bringing it to the Council.



League of Women Voters® of Evanston

2100 Ridge Avenue in Evanston, IL 60201

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