

League of Women Voters of La Plata County

2011-2012 Program for Study and Action

Local Positions

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY DESERT ROCK ENERGY PROJECT

The LWV of La Plata County joins with the LWV of Cortez-Montezuma County in opposing the Desert Rock Energy Project unless and until the Environmental Impact Statement is amended to include a fourth alternative, which commits the BIA and Sithe Global Power LLC to a package of emissions reductions, specifically sulfur dioxide and/or nitrogen oxides, at the two existing coal-fired power plants, such that there is a net environmental improvement in the regional visibility impairment, while allowing the full scale 1500-megawatt Desert Rock plant to be built.

In addition, while we appreciate the desire of the Navajo Nation Tribal Council to capitalize on their natural resources for energy, jobs and revenue, we urge the Tribal Council and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to provide for sequestration of greenhouse gases at all future coal-fired power plants on tribal lands and to explore the use of their solar and wind energy resources for energy production.

This position was adopted by the membership at membership meeting, September 11, 2007.

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY LIBRARY BOND ISSUE

The League of Women Voters of La Plata County supports Referred Measure 2A, the City of Durango Ballot Library Question referred to City of Durango voters in the November 2006 election to authorize issuance of bonds for the construction of the new library facility.

The substance of the ballot question is:

- To increase the debt of the City of Durango by \$15,890,000, with a maximum repayment cost of \$26,305,900, through the issuance of bonds
- To repay the debt with an existing revenue stream consisting of 50% of the . cent sales and use tax already approved by voters in April, 2005 without imposing new taxes or tax rate increases (this tax, approved by voters in April, 2005, has associated with it a sunset clause and will terminate on December 31, 2026)
- To use the raised funds to acquire the old Mercy Hospital site, and to construct, install and equip the new library facility, including costs associated with site improvements.

Paragraphs 3-5 of the ballot question refer to the process which must be followed by a government entity in order to issue bonds, in this case for the principal amount of \$15,890,000, and an interest rate that would result in a repayment amount of no more than \$26,305,900 upon bond maturity or sooner.

Concerning the site acquisition and construction of the new library facility, the League of Women Voters of La Plata County strongly urges the City of Durango to endorse and abide by the following criteria:

1. Average size and capacity of the new library facility through the year 2030 will meet or exceed the 50th percentile as defined by the official 2005 Colorado Public Library Standards*, recognizing that the Durango Library must serve all of La Plata County;

2. Design of the infrastructure and facility will be sufficiently flexible to allow expansion as needs dictate, and resources become available;
3. Construction and maintenance of the new library facility will comply with the LEED** (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) green building rating standards concerning energy and environmental design;
4. The new library facilities will accommodate a flexible and combined library program/public meeting space sufficient for a minimum audience of 200 people.

*www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/Standards/Index.htm

**www.nrdc.org/buildinggreen/leed.asp

This position was adopted by the membership at the Annual Meeting, May 11, 2007.

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY HEALTH SERVICE DISTRICT

The League of Women Voters of La Plata County supports the proposed La Plata County Health Service District. After thorough review of the service plan, and various other studies and surveys used to develop the plan, League members agree that the proposed ballot issue addresses the health care needs of La Plata County residents in an appropriate way.

This position was adopted by the membership at the Annual Meeting, May 13, 2006

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY VOTE CENTER CONCEPT AND ITS APPLICABILITY TO LA PLATA COUNTY

The League of Women Voters of La Plata County supports the concept of vote centers*, which we believe has the potential of increasing citizen participation in the political process by making voting easier. Members support the implementation of vote centers in La Plata County if and when all the following conditions are met:

1. Cost effectiveness: the potential savings produced by consolidation over time must make the initial investment worthwhile
2. Design of overall system is voter friendly to all demographic groups (rural voters, urban voters, minorities, voters with disabilities, voters with limited mobility, rural residents who work out of state, etc.)
3. Enabling technical requirements are met:
 - a. Secure systems
 - b. Acceptable connectivity from all voting locations to the centralized database (High speed connectivity will be necessary for large vote centers, dedicated dial-up may be adequate for small precincts)
 - c. Single, state-wide voter database with fast, simultaneous access capability from multiple centers
4. Plans for training for election officials and adequate education for voters are in place
5. A monitoring system that measures the success of the vote center concept in La Plata County according to defined parameters, such as voter turnout, voter satisfaction and costs/savings, is in place
6. Continued availability of early and absentee voting

Members agree that the ability to print the appropriate ballot at the vote center for each individual voter would be ideal but not a requirement for implementation of vote centers.

Members believe a mix of vote centers and traditional polling places is acceptable if required to meet the needs of various demographic segments of the voting public, especially during the transition period.

Members agree that the implementation of the vote center concept in La Plata County cannot be considered a success unless

1. The process of voting takes the same or less time for all county residents than it does today, in 2006.
2. Overall voter turnout increases over time without a decrease in turnout for any specific demographic segment.

*The State of Colorado defines a vote center as 'a polling place at which any registered elector in the political subdivision holding the election may vote, regardless of the precinct in which the elector resides'

This position was adopted by the membership at the Annual Meeting, May 13, 2006

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY AFFORDABLE HOUSING POSITION

The League of Women Voters of La Plata County believes that La Plata County should strive to be a 'mixed community', defined as a community where individuals and families of all income levels, ethnicities and age groups live together within a reasonable distance of their workplaces and community services. The League believes that in order to reach and maintain that goal, an adequate amount of affordable rental and owner-occupied housing must be available. Additionally, the cost of providing such housing should be shared equitably by the entire community, without placing undue burden on any one sector of the economy or producing unintended consequences. The League agrees that government has a role in assuring adequate affordable housing.

The League urges that a regional housing authority be established and that all eligible governmental units within it participate. The League believes that the types of financing mechanisms/subsidies currently available to builders and developers and to qualifying low-income renters and purchasers in La Plata County should continue. Additionally, the League supports mechanisms which would provide down payment assistance for working individuals and families who are able to afford reasonable mortgage payments but cannot accumulate the initial investment and who do not qualify for other assistance.

The League believes that governmental units should use both incentives and requirements to encourage businesses, including developers, to provide affordable housing units and that the county and the governmental units within it should coordinate these incentives/requirements in order to assure that the county develops as a mixed community. We agree that inclusionary zoning, or an equivalent, should be used throughout the county and its municipalities as one tool to require developers to provide for affordable housing units. We agree that housing linkage fees assessed on businesses with low wage employees and on new residences above a certain size be considered as one tool to make additional funding available for affordable housing. Such linkage fees should not be unfairly burdensome, particularly on small businesses.

The League affirms in general the positions of the League of Women Voters of Colorado and of the United States on affordable housing.

This position was adopted by the membership at the Annual Meeting, May 11, 2004 and reaffirmed May 13, 2006.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY EDUCATIONAL POLICY

LA PLATA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS' PROGRAM & BUILDING NEEDS:*

The League of Women Voters of La Plata County believes:

- An educational program must be known and well defined before a building can be designed and built.
- The program should be defined by teachers, students, the citizenry, and administrators; and accepted by the Boards of Education.
- Boards of Education should take the lead in developing a strong career and technical program for middle and high school students.
- A comprehensive physical education program, including health education, should serve the needs of the total student body. The emphasis should be on individual sports, physical fitness and intramural sports while continuing the excellent varsity program.
- A comprehensive fine arts program should be available at all schools.
- There should be adequate budgeting for custodial and maintenance services to provide for clean buildings and effective maintenance throughout the school system. If an increased budget is needed for increased staff or contracting (maintenance) services, then the League supports the increase.
- Joint use (of) facilities by the school districts, city, and county should be encouraged whenever feasible.
- When educational programs are well defined and building needs can be determined, building plans should be developed immediately to fulfill the needs of the educational program within the maximum bonding capacity.

**This position was originally drafted in the 1960's, updated in the 1980's and updated again January 2002 and was reaffirmed at the Annual Meeting, May 11, 2004 and May 13, 2006. This update replaces the section entitled "School District 9-R Building Needs" in the local publication Local Program for Study and Action.*

LA PLATA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS ACCOUNTABILITY:*

Members of the League of Women Voters of La Plata County unanimously agree with the concept of accountability. The League believes that school districts should be held responsible to the public for their use of tax dollars and the education that is given to local students. The League of Women Voters of La Plata County recommends the following in order to assure accountability to the community on the part of La Plata County School Districts:

- Parents, staff and the community in general should be encouraged to participate in school decision making.

- Parents and the community should have reasonable accessibility to the superintendents, principals and board members.
- Frequent open invitations should be extended to parents and the community to visit the schools and participate in activities.
- Parents and the community should have regular, formalized opportunities to communicate their concerns to the schools and the school boards.
- School districts should publish a yearly progress report on the goals of the district and the individual schools.
- School districts should disseminate school news and information on a regular basis.
- Parent meetings should be well publicized and attendance encouraged.

**This position was drafted in 1975, updated in 1987 and updated again in January 2002 and was reaffirmed at the Annual Meeting, May 11, 2004 and May 13, 2006. This update replaces the section entitled "School District 9R Accountability" in the local publication Local Program for Study and Action.*

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY DURANGO CITY GOVERNMENT

It is the consensus of the League of Women Voters of La Plata County that the present Council-Manager form of government in the City of Durango is structurally sound; however, modifications should be incorporated to make it functionally more responsive to the citizens. The recommended modifications are:

Full Financial Disclosure. Improvement in two areas is necessary:

1. Finance Committee. Positions on the finance committee should be advertised so that citizens are given every opportunity to participate on this important committee. Rotating membership, with a combination of new members and old members each year, is recommended. With new members each year, the committee will not be so likely to become stale. There would be fresh ideas and enthusiasm each year. Also, if the Finance Committee is actively functioning, two or three years of service on the committee are all that should be asked of a member. It would not be a good idea, however, to have an entirely new committee each year. A few experienced members can help to guide the committee. There should be a limited number of years of service on the committee; three years should be the maximum.
2. Budget and Financial Reports. The annual budget should be made available for public review at least one month before adoption. It takes a great deal of in-depth study to be able to understand and appraise a budget. Presenting a budget one week and adopting it the next week excludes citizen participation. A summary of the budget can be facilitated with simplified graphic presentation. Monthly financial reports, including a list of vendors and the amount of business done with each should be available for citizen review at City Hall. A general financial statement should be published at least quarterly and preferably monthly in the news media.

Inter-governmental Cooperation. It was the consensus that inter-governmental cooperation should be encouraged. It was felt that areas of agreement should be formalized so that changes in City Council members and County Commissioners will not jeopardize existing cooperation.

Citizen Information. All City Council and board meetings must be publicized and open to the public. There should be a regular, consistent place for notices in the newspaper, e.g., a local government column.

Each board chairman must know his/her responsibility to publicize every meeting. Governmental officers should press the media for earlier, more thorough coverage. Adequate notice of meetings should be given; and radio should be used to assure that those who do not take the newspapers will be informed. We note that Durango City Council meetings are now televised on CitySpan10.

Citizen Participation. To assure that everyone has an opportunity to serve on city boards or commissions, vacancies should be advertised by both radio and newspapers. There should be a consistent set of requirements for selecting members of committees. Committees and boards should have consistent rules of procedure and bylaws. A list of vacancies should be published periodically. Having the same people serve on several committees (city, county, state and regional) should be discouraged. Candidates should be actively sought through local community organizations. There should be a public forum to bring up public issues and discuss decisions before every City Council meeting, with at least fifteen minutes allowed. If sufficient interest is generated, a town meeting should be held periodically upon request to the Council to establish the criteria for such a meeting. To increase interest in city government, the Council should be encouraged to have a more receptive attitude toward the public. The Council room should be changed to make it more open and comfortable. The raised dais should be eliminated.

Budget and Finance. Expenditures should be posted and published in an easy-to-read format. The budget should be readily available to the public. Auditors should be changed frequently and hired from local firms. The Council should hold public informational meetings before voting on the report of the Budget and Finance Committees. Reimbursement procedures should be facilitated and improved.

Council members. Council members should be paid more; but first, there should be a survey of similar towns to determine the amount.

This position, originally adopted in the 1980s, was reaffirmed at the Annual Meeting, May 11, 2004

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

The League of Women Voters of La Plata County supports a Comprehensive Plan for Durango and La Plata County - responsive to the will of the people and subject to annual review - which will:

- Allow for orderly development
- Preserve the natural beauty of the area
- Recognize the uniqueness of the natural beauty and encourage good design in relation to the topography.
- Centralize the location of possible new industry into a single area.
- Provide functional (commuter) paths, recreational paths (bicycle, jogging and walking lanes) and trails for non-motorized traffic, especially along new construction areas and improvement projects.

- Provide for the implementation of the plan, with emphasis on increasing multiple family dwellings affordable to low and moderate income families.
- Discourage “leapfrog” or sprawled residential and commercial growth.
- Discourage strip development by concentrating areas of commercial growth and by controlling the size of subdivided lots.
- Encourage cluster development by permitting the landowner to build on a smaller size lot and allow the remainder to become open space.
- Explore ways in which growth can be made to pay its own way.
- Provide well-planned growth centers that would include basic services.
- Create a more viable downtown.
- Address the problem of parking by (1) providing more parking through the development of citywide and privately owned parking facilities both in the core business district and on the outskirts of the city; (2) providing designated parking areas for recreation vehicles; (3) developing an effective mass transit system; and (4) discouraging single passenger cars.
- Ease traffic problems in the county by: (1) encouraging carpools; (2) developing an effective mass transit system; (3) realigning certain roads; (4) repairing existing roads; and (5) building new roads to improve traffic flow.

This position, originally adopted in the 1980s, was reaffirmed at the Annual Meeting, May 11, 2004

**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY
COUNTY HOME RULE**

The League of Women Voters of La Plata County supports the concept of County Home Rule. In the consensus taken in the spring of 1990, members expressed concern over the lack of effectiveness and efficiency of county government, public unrest over many and varied county disputes, power of commissioners and direction of the county government. It was determined that a study of county government with the possibility of home rule should be promoted.

This position, originally adopted in 1990, was reaffirmed at the Annual Meeting, May 11, 2004

All positions were reaffirmed by the membership on May 10, 2011.