



The Fresno VOTER

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Calendar

Tuesday, January 24
 Regular Board Meeting
 5 p.m., League office
**Note—4th Tuesday,
 no longer 3rd Tuesday**

Saturday, February 4
 Program Planning Meeting
 League Office
 See top of page 3

Wednesday, February 8
 Lunch & Learn
 Solar Energy Panel
 Noon, League Office
 See page 1

Tuesday, February 28
 Regular Board Meeting
 5 p.m.—League office

Sunday, March 25
 Philip Levine in person
 Newman Center
 Details page 6

It's looking sunny for solar in Fresno; County task force meets on proposals

by Diane Merrill

Currently there are over 30 applications to build large-scale solar energy facilities on around 10,000 acres in Fresno County. Much of the proposed solar construction is on agricultural land, and there is potential for solar development proposals on a large amount of additional ag land.

On October 25, the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to set up a task force to develop guidelines for the County on solar energy development. The League was invited to be a member of the task force.

League members Mary Savala, Diane Merrill, and Bob Merrill attended the first meeting on November 17. Solar developers, Westlands Water District, PG&E, County staff, and

the State Department of Conservation provided information on a variety of topics relating to solar development. Presentations included site selection and economics of solar projects, the processes for interconnection to the electric grid, Westlands Water District water and land use policies relating to solar development, and compatibility issues between solar development and agricultural uses, especially with regard to soil types and water uses tied to the definition of prime agricultural land.

During the public comment portion of the meeting the League again recommended that solar developers be required to compensate for the loss of agricultural land by preserving other ag land within the County.

The meeting concluded with a list of recom-

mendations for the County staff as they propose policies for the County Board of Supervisors to adopt. A date to bring the proposals to the Board has not yet been set.

SOLAR LUNCH & LEARN



WEDNESDAY, February 8

11:30 a.m.

Woodward Park Library

944 E Perrin, Fresno

Panelists

Alan Boyce

CEO, Westlands Solar Farms

Jeanette Ishii

PG&E Govt. Relations

Carol Hafner

FC Ag Commissioner

Bring a sandwich; we'll provide snack & beverage

Free and open to the public

President's Message



I've been serving as co-chair on the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Revision of Fresno's General Plan. We've been meeting for some months now and are fairly over-loaded with interesting but technical material about Economic Development, Urban Form, Healthy Communities, Transportation and Resource Conservation.

Now we are coming down to having to make some decisions regarding recommendations to City Hall. Under Urban Form, there are three "broad brush" scenarios of how Fresno could grow and enhance its way of life. Two of the scenarios propose to provide for future growth through increased densities and land use patterns. The third scenario would expand Fresno's Sphere of Influence to support additional residential units while maintaining current densities and land use patterns.

In addition to those scenarios, the committee has to deliberate on 16 potential new initiatives regarding Transportation and Mobility. These include the concept of transportation facilities based on "Complete Streets" that facilitate the balanced use of pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit users.

Resource Conservation includes initiatives to make efficient use of existing public infrastructure, promote land uses that conserve resources and promote enhanced energy efficiency.

Economic Development initiatives would address attracting and recruiting businesses, cultivating and attracting a skilled, educated and well-trained work force, improving the business climate, and maintaining the city's fiscal health and enlarging its revenue base.

Healthy Communities involves decisions around designing new development to promote physical activity, provide access to fresh and healthy food, and deter crime.

You can see that each of these issues is complex. Many hours of deliberation are ahead of us. All residents are invited to public discussions on the alternatives. The next meeting is at Hoover High School on January 12 at 6 p.m.

Francine

Friant Ranch Lawsuit—Good News!

The League Board has received \$5,000 from the Northern California Grassroots Fund, an arm of the Rose Foundation, to pay administrative costs of the Friant Ranch lawsuit. The grant proposal was submitted by Mary Savala. The local Sierra Club has committed to paying attorney's fees.

A fund-raising event in March is being sponsored by the lawsuit partners (see Levine, page 6) to pay additional fees.

Member News

Please make notes in your roster accordingly.

Change of Address

Carol Brylka

1000 El Camino Real, Apt. 105
Santa Clara, CA 95050

Maxine Madden Spencer

5515 North Fresno St., Apt. 231
Fresno, CA 93710

Congratulations!

Betty and Bill Noblett will receive the Social Action Award from Temple Beth Israel for their work in setting up and maintaining a free dental clinic at Stone Soup for fifteen years. The banquet honoring them is scheduled for January 13 at 6 p.m. at the Temple. Call 960-1653 to arrange for tickets at \$25 each.

We gratefully accept celebratory and memorial gifts. Your check may be made out to LWVF Ed Fund, and it will be tax deductible.



This month we received generous donations from the following:

John Donaldson

Francine and Murray Farber

Georgia Sisson

Your contribution for the Friant

lawsuit should be made out to Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter and note

Friant Ranch Lawsuit in the memo line.

All donations should be sent to

Jane Worsley

Treasurer, LWVF

1345 Bulldog Lane

Fresno, 93710



MARK YOUR CALENDAR



PROGRAM PLANNING MEETING

TELL US YOUR PRIORITIES

SATURDAY, February 4

9.am. Breakfast

9:30 Discuss priorities

League Office

Radley Reep extends his gratitude to the LWVF for recognizing his efforts towards protecting the natural resources in our community and for helping him buy a text so that he could complete a class on website development.



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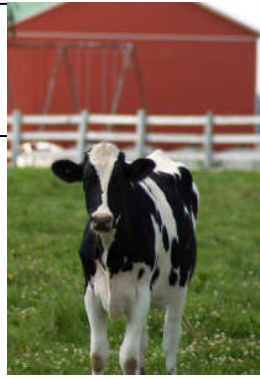
The VOTER

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League of Women Voters Fresno

Mailing Address:

1345 Bulldog Lane

Fresno, CA 93705



More than 10 years ago, League and Medical Advocates for Healthy Air sued the City of Fresno and the developers of Copper River Ranch over the inadequacy of the environmental evaluation. The plaintiffs and defendants agreed to a settlement in November 2003, which provided about \$60,000 for mitigation of agriculture land converted to residential and commercial land use.

A committee of two plaintiffs and two defendants, with a fifth member to be named by the committee, was formed to fund a strategic easement acquisition plan and feasible steps toward implementation of a Fresno County farmland conservation trust.

The Sequoia River Land Trust was organized to protect land in Tulare County. However, it became apparent that a farm land conservation trust was necessary to preserve farm lands in the entire southern San Joaquin Valley. Therefore, SRT expanded its mission to include farm land preservation in Kern, Kings, Tulare and Fresno Counties.

A condition of the grant to SRT was that it report on progress to educate and reach out to the community and agencies about the use of development easements to secure the permanent preservation of farm land. A conservation easement on land provides cash or charitable tax benefits to land owners in return for giving up their right to develop the land to other uses.

Our grant money has enabled SRT to work with other land trusts and the Fresno County Board of Supervisors to develop a farmland mitigation program focused exclusively on aggregate mining on the Kings River; SRT has been able to continue work on farmland conservation outreach, education, easement acquisition, land use planning and mapping and policy formation in Fresno County.

SRT has also engaged in outreach and education for industries and public entities that need to mitigate for loss of farmland including Caltrans and the High Speed Rail Authority. It has participated in the Fresno Food System Alliance to work on local sustainable agriculture and food security efforts, and SRT

Greenhouse gas update

by Nyla Zender

SB375 requires the Air Resources Board to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by prompting California's 18 Metropolitan Planning Organizations to come up with plans to reduce emissions from vehicle use by creating Sustainable Community Strategies through integrated land use housing and transportation planning.

Fresno County could work together with a few adjacent counties that have begun planning or it could decide to go it alone.

The COG financial team is working on a realistic financial forecast to support the target-setting efforts; Planning Center, a private firm hired by the region, is working on the demographic/employment forecast to be completed this month.

The committee viewed a presentation on *Envision Tomorrow*, a planning tool for scenario development. The Scenario Building Process starts with a library of building types that are financially feasible at the local level; the Development Types define buildings, streets and amenities that make up the places where residents live work and play; and the Scenario Development paints future land use scenarios to test the implications of different decisions or policies. Finally there is Evaluation to compare the scenarios and monitor the impact of land use decisions in real time.

coordinated a speakers' series focusing on land and water conservation.

SRT has recently closed Fresno County's first agricultural conservation easement on prime soils near Kingsburg. SRT has also conducted two prioritization assessments and maps identifying the specific geographic areas where farmland outreach and ag easement acquisitions should be prioritized. SRT has continued a education and outreach program for the farming community framing agricultural conservation easements as "business tools" for farmers. The grant money has enabled SRT to match other funds which are used for assessing issues that bar the marketing of farm products to local markets and institutions.

Education News

by Kay Bertken



I find myself enormously sympathetic to the people who work in our schools, which have become yet another locus of the anger that permeates our communities as resources shrink. Amplifying the difficulties in education is the fact that nearly everyone feels like an expert in the field and is not hesitant to promote a reform agenda that serves a particular interest.

The December FUSD Board of Trustee meeting reflected the Board fractiousness and public hostility that has been typical recently. It was the first meeting following a series of Fresno Bee articles criticizing the District for its inattention to the dropout problem and the organizing of a community effort to break up the District. Javier Guzman, the director of the Chicano Youth Center and a leader of a group that supports the split, was on the agenda with a proposal to establish a commission to address the dropout issue.

Quick fix not possible

Mr. Guzman proposed that he establish a commission that would have “statutory powers” to direct funds and initiate programs to not just address, but solve the dropout problem. He proposed that his commission would determine the risk factors and eliminate them. He imagines a technical problem with a quick solution.

But the League has participated

in several dropout efforts over the last years, including Mayor Autry’s Roundtable on Dropouts and the United Way Dropout Summit. Dropout risk factors are well researched. The problem is a community issue, rooted in the intense poverty and deprivations that we know afflict our region. Risks include broken families, absent parents, unsafe neighborhoods, compromised health, teen pregnancy, gangs, joblessness, as well as a national educational agenda that is forcing schools to limit their curricular offerings to meet testing goals.

FUSD long-term remedies

While there are not the quick fixes that Mr. Guzman expects, the school district has not devoted enough direct attention to the problem. It has taken a long term, big picture approach—preschool, improved achievement in the early years of elementary school, a focus on improved school facilities and consistent feeder patterns to keep students focused through important transitions, mandatory summer school for credit recovery. It has not however, effectively addressed the needs of thousands of high school students who have left our comprehensive high schools and are drifting in and out of independent

study programs before they permanently disengage.

The District has had some success with commissions targeting specific issues in the past.—an English as a Second Language Task Force, a Career Technical Education Task Force, an Attendance Task Force. A commission addressing the dropout issue might mobilize community resources around the effort and help the District target its efforts. Mr. Guzman might effectively serve on such a commission, but his proposals suggest that he is not the person to lead that effort. Because a commission will certainly draw on scarce District resources, it is essential that the District be engaged and participate in the formation of the group. Previous efforts have been ineffective in imposing an agenda from the outside.

Dropout rate explained

Note: The 53% graduation rate for FUSD cited in the Bee exaggerated the dropout figure. It was calculated as a comparison of the California Department of Education enrollments of seniors in 2010 to the number of 9th graders four years earlier. These high school enrollment numbers count the number of students who would be in those grades based on the number of units they have completed. The numbers include all students who have achieved only a ninth grader’s credit status. Those included would be 10th and 11th and 12th graders who have not been passing their classes. The ninth grade enrollments routinely represent a significant growth from the 8th grade enrollments of the previous year because of this credit-based designation.

Lost Lake Renovation Halted

by Radley Reep

The "Friends of Lost Lake Park" is a coalition of Fresno Audubon Society, the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club, Revive the San Joaquin, the San Joaquin River Conservation and Parkway Trust and the League of Women Voters to improve Lost Lake Park. The Fresno County Board of Supervisors authorized County Staff to work with the coalition and to accept donations of time and materials.

Last October, volunteers assessed the condition of camping and picnic facilities throughout the park. Much repair is needed. to campsites, barbecues, picnic tables and restrooms. In November, volunteers repainted the entrance pay booth and two information kiosks.

On December 1 the park was hard hit by a windstorm which damaged 155 trees, 82 of which were toppled. The uplifting of roots broke water and sewer lines.. At present, the park is a mess. It is closed and will remain that way until the debris is cleared and



the park is once again operational

You can communicate with the coalition via the email address shown below. Provide an email address, and you will receive volunteer event announcements and up-to-date information on the condition of the park.

LostLakePark@gmail.com.



Thanks to Bette Peterson for her generous underwriting of this event.

Join us and hear National Poet Laureate Philip Levine

Sunday
March 25

at 2pm

Newman Center
1572 E. Barstow
Fresno

Tickets \$20
Students \$5

At 83, Philip Levine has been writing poetry for the voiceless since he worked in Detroit's auto factories when he was a young man.

Levine's writing boils down to "This is what happened to me and this is what I am."

LevineEvent@gmail.com

Sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Fresno and the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club to raise funds to support Priant Ranch litigation.

*This is
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happened
to me
and this
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Men and Women of Voting Age Making Democracy Work

MISSION: The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens and influences public policy through voter education and advocacy on issues.

NONPARTISANSHIP: The League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.

DIVERSITY POLICY: There shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the LWVF on the basis of race, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or socio-economic level.

TO PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS: For more information, please leave your name and phone number on the League message phone, 226-8683, or contact our **Membership Chair, Dolores O'Neal at 435-1185**. Prospective members receive one issue of *The Fresno Voter* free.

JOIN US! Members receive newsletters from national, state and local Leagues, may access local, state and national League websites and list-serves, and may participate in League studies of issues.

Yearly Dues Individual - \$60 ~ Family - \$90 (2 members, same address) ~ Student - \$30

Please send your check payable to the League of Women Voters, Fresno, with registration form (below),
 to: LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Suite 4, Fresno, CA 93710.

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