



The Brown County Voter

FEBRUARY 25, 2017

CALENDAR

Saturday, March 11 10:00 - noon, Meet Your Legislators
 Courthouse Annex Salmon Room
 State Senator Eric Koch
 and State Rep. Chris May
 Hear their updates and ask your questions!
 Everyone welcome.



Eric Koch

Chris May

Monday, March 13 10:00 am Board meeting downstairs at the Library
 Everyone is welcome!

Sunday, April 23 Volksmarch sponsored by our League and Bloomington Flying Fish
 Watch for details.

Presidents Day 2017

by Julie Winn

The League of Women Voters of Indiana held its annual Presidents Day workshop on Saturday, February 18, in Indianapolis. About 45 representatives of some 16 League chapters from around the state congregated to exchange news and ideas, and to be updated on several issues.

Takeaways:

- Some Leagues have seen a noticeable uptick in memberships during and after the general election of 2016.
- The annual Convention will be held in South Bend April 29-30.
- In addition to the annual \$300 grants we can all get from the State Education Fund, LWVUS (the national organization) has grants available for voter registration projects that target new teen voters and naturalized citizens (note: a couple of Leagues located where naturalization ceremonies are held do have active programs, including registration tables at the ceremonies).

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- LWVUS is encouraging local Leagues nationwide to become 501(c)(3) organizations. Most local Leagues are 501(c)(4), which means they are not for profit but donations are not tax free. Our Education Funds are tax exempt but only because they are held by the State League's separate 501(c)(3) arm. Although that is our money, we must ask the State Board to approve its release every time. This odd structure has also meant that when we do have campaigns for donations, we must make clear that there is a dual system and that only the Education Fund is tax exempt, all very complicated. The system was put into place because there are lobbying restrictions on 501(c)(3)s. LWVUS now tells us that a 501(c)(3) can use up to 20% of its resources for lobbying without losing tax exempt status. Since most local Leagues do little to no lobbying, we are urged to transition, which would allow us to keep our Education Funds in our own account, and would mean any donation to us for any League purpose would be tax-exempt. LWVUS has an expert who is putting together all the templates and steps we need if we choose to do this, and we can expect to hear more guidance in the coming months. The State League will transition first, and then give us the benefit of their experience.
- HB 1014, calling for establishment of an independent redistricting commission in Indiana, died in Committee when, despite thousands of calls, the Chair of the Committee on Elections and Apportionment declined to

hold a vote. LWVIN will continue to pursue this endeavor in the next session.

- With regard to League procedures, all Boards should have an archive of not only our by-laws but several policies (on non-partisanship, social media, event planning, candidate forums, press release templates, etc). Your Board will work on this project.
- There was some discussion of what the State League should focus on during the next two years. Sentiment on the part of leadership was that we should emphasize voter education, voter rights, and democracy and not on new studies. This is what the national League is also planning. There will be further discussion of this at Convention.
- Some interesting ideas for action:
 - One League held a "Citizens Forum" before the series of Candidate Forums to review what the various elected officials' job descriptions are, along with other issues of local interest so that the questions at the Forums could be more on point. This was well-attended.
 - South Bend has been very successful in fundraising by gathering sponsors of its publications (like Who's Where, and our Citizens Guide).
 - Greencastle gets its new members involved by assigning them requests for information under the Public Access laws. They suggest that we celebrate Sunshine Week by doing a similar project.

All in all, a productive few hours with the League!

Forest Alliance Rally at the Statehouse

by Pam Raider

Despite fears of a small showing, the rally at the statehouse in support of SB 420 which would set aside 10% of state forest lands from logging, the rally drew some 650 people from all over the state. The bill was heard by the Natural Resources Committee on February 13. It is still unclear whether this bill will be allowed to advance to a vote on the floor, or appear as an amendment on another bill – the final decision is that of committee chair, Republican Senator Susan Glick. Many attendees stayed to meet with their representative, so I suppose there is still hope.

Rally attendees heard many speakers including Jeff Stant, IFA President; the head of Hoosier Environmental Council; Brown County's own Dave Seastrom; and Bloomington Democratic representatives Matt Pierce and Mark Stoops; as well as the Republican Senator from Jasper County who sponsored the bill. We were also entertained by music from Brown County musicians Hammer and the Hatchett and Cari Ray as well as Tim Grimm. It was a raucous event which Matt Pierce stated was one of the largest events ever hosted in the statehouse and our voices could be heard all over the state house. A special impassioned speech by Bloomington High Schooler Liam Murphy reminded us all of what environmental challenges their generation will be facing. We also learned of an old growth stand adjacent to Crown Hill Cemetery slated for destruction.

Under Governor Mitch Daniels the Department of Natural Resources budget had been cut from 12 million dollars to seven million. The DNR responded up by upping log

cutting on state owned lands from 17% of new growth to 60%. This amounts to a 400% increase. Furthermore, the DNR wants to selectively make our woods mostly hickory and oak (possibly because they are more profitable timber trees) thereby cutting out many other species of trees. It appears the people's forests have now become a timber lot, not an indigenous forest. Senate Bill 420 sought to set aside 10% of state parcels which would be allowed to grow into old growth forest stands. Despite the fact that some six PHD's had testified at the committee hearing, the bill appears to be stalled in committee and will not make it to full vote. Last year a similar bill hoping to set aside 23% of forests was presented – co-sponsored by our own Eric Koch - and it too did not make it out of committee.

The legislators who spoke encouraged the attendees to persevere, to keep working to present another bill next year. Although this was an example of participatory democracy, it is disheartening to see people work so hard only to have bills die in committee. This has also been the fate of the gerrymandering bill 1014 which the League has worked so hard to introduce two years in a row. At the President's day League event Julia Vaughn from Common Cause seemed undaunted and vowed to present that bill again next year – the Indiana Forest Alliance has vowed the same.

To read and see more on the forest rally, go to the Indiana Forest Alliance Facebook page or website. I perhaps do not need to remind Leaguers how important it is, especially in these times, to be informed and to contact your representatives about your concerns – after all, they work for us, don't they?

Nashville Town Council meeting, Town Hall

Thursday, Feb. 16, 2017

by Heather Nicholson

- The changed status of Big Woods' Firecracker Hill's zoning was recognized by the Town Council. Earlier in the week, the Brown County Commission voted unanimously to approve the zoning change of 93.9 acres from residential/forest to business use.
- The Town Council introduced new fire Chief Nick Kelp.
- Town's finances for 2016 are balanced. Water Department was 11% under budget. Sewer Department was under budget - a 5 year low. All savings have been rolled into the 2017 capital expansion budget.
- Town's 2017 budget is expected to be tight. One big expense is the need for a new Town Hall roof.
- Sewer Plant will receive new low-speed fans and a wireless operation upgrade. These will save operating costs over years.
- Big Woods and the BC Playhouse were both granted temporary right-of-ways in their alleys to accommodate events in March.
- Yard parking permits are free, but required, for residents wishing to allow parking for visitors.
- A new-business carwash facility was granted an easement through Town Police property.

Brown County Commissioner's Meeting

Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2017

by Heather Nicholson

- Approved - approximately \$37,000 and another \$12,000 to the BC Humane Society.
- Approved - a microfilm services contract for off-site storage and automatic downloads from the BC Recorder office.
- Approved - the re-zoning of 93.9 acres, referred to as Firecracker Hill, from residential/forest preserve to general business. Red Truck, LLC is the developer for Big Woods Distillery - the new owner. The Commissioners were questioned by several residents. The Commissioners answered the concerns by the following statements: The BC Area Planning had given this re-zoning a positive recommendation on January 24. The County has no control what business does on its property. They try to zone property to keep like-uses contingent. Any traffic issues will be addressed by the Town of Nashville when/if annexed. There will be a feasibility study later. The selling of 'out lots' is not restricted. The odors from the distilling process can be handled by the BC Health Dept. with enforcement and fines. Any odors would likely blow away from the Town by the winds. *Continued page 5*
- When asked, Christine Ritzmann, Planning Director, clarified to the Board that they can make adjustments or restrictions to the proposed re-zoning request and send it back to the Area Planning. The vote was when held.

- A meeting about Helmsburg redevelopment will be held Feb. 22.
 - Approved - a new definition of a "Private Recreational Development" for zoning proposes.
 - BC Highway Superintendent reported the following: Two trucks are falling apart. He requested buying a new 2016 truck for cash. BCC approved. The bridge inspection report is finished. Yellow Wood Road project will start June 1 and continue through the summer. This should complete the middle and south portions. The north portion is scheduled to be worked on in 2018.
 - The BC Health Board will have a work session this month with no public input. The septic ordinance will be discussed.
 - The BC Court House issue was mentioned. LWV white paper, citizen's survey, Jim Bass(?) white paper and Tim Clark website were found and to be shared by Diana Biddle. BCC noted that we still owe on the loan for the jail bonds.
 - Jim Schultz reported on Earth Day, Keep BC Beautiful, and Great American Clean-up organized for April 22. He also requested action to use the rest of the grant money for fixing the old log jail before the grant expires. There is still \$9,200 left to replace rotted logs. There is disagreement with the Historical Society about using whole or half logs. Ms. Biddle will meet with all parties to resolve this week.
 - Tanner Bowman, LWVBC member, will start an Eagle Scout project. He will request donations from the public and will receive the remaining moneys needed from the BC Council. His project is to build a higher backstop at the Sheriff Rife Range.
 - Legislative update by Mike (?) reported as follows: There is a Bill in the State House for a \$1 increase in cigarette tax. State will invest \$185,000,000 for opium/heroin issues. State will have no increase in overall spending in 2017. Level 6 felons will go directly to State jails. A new Vacation Rental Property Bill passed. There is discussion of tolls on major highways to pay for road improvements.
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Dorothy Stewart Scholarship

Please think about a donation to the "Dorothy Stewart Scholarship" with the Brown County Community Foundation. Dorothy was one of our League founding members and its first president. The scholarship will go to a Brown County graduating senior who is interested in a political or environmental field of study. Your tax-exempt donation provides scholarships to Brown County students interested in civics.