

The nonpartisan League of Women Voters has been a champion of government transparency since our founding in 1920. It is one of our core principles and a vital part of our mission. Observer Corps members of our local LWV of the Mother Lode carry out this mission by attending local governmental meetings to help ensure that citizens are aware of the decisions that impact their lives and to promote government transparency and accountability. Currently members regularly attend meetings of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors and Sonora City Council. As we approach the end of 2021, the LWVML Observer Corps would like to share this annual retrospective of our local government.

First and most importantly, we thank all our elected officials, as well as city and county staff for their service. They put in countless hours and work conscientiously to serve the public.

Governments cannot run without a budget, the creation of which can be a difficult, contentious process, but not in Tuolumne County. Both the Board of Supervisors and the City Council passed budgets in a timely, efficient manner.

During this difficult year public gatherings were a challenge. Thank you to the Board of Supervisors and, ultimately, to the City Council for meeting this challenge by safely opening your meetings for public attendance with masks and social distancing. Continued virtual attendance has allowed citizens to participate at their comfort levels.

Homelessness is a serious concern in our community. We commend both of our governing bodies for their efforts in this area: the Board for the creation of a Citizens Advisory Commission on Homelessness and the Sonora City Council for their purchase of buildings to be used as shelters for this population.

We commend the City Council for recognizing the diversity in our community with the formation of the Social Equity Committee.

We applaud the Board of Supervisors for recognizing California Native American Day, honoring the Native American heritage in our county.

It has been a long, difficult year, and we appreciate the dedication of both observed entities. We do have a few concerns.

The staff of the Tuolumne County Public Health Department regularly presents a report to the Board of Supervisors on the status update of the Novel Coronavirus

(COVID-19.) We are concerned that some Board members have taken this as an opportunity to digress into lengthy sharing of personal views and agendas.

While the goals of the Social Equity Committee are commendable, on occasion the discussions following the reports displayed a lack of civility.

We do have a few parliamentary suggestions in the interest of “sunshine” or openness in government. We appreciate that both the City Council and the Board of Supervisors post their agendas within the required 72 hours prior to their meetings, but we are concerned about the frequent late amendments to the agenda posted by the BOS. Sometimes these are posted as late as the evening before the meeting. Additionally, a public roll call at the beginning of each meeting would be appreciated. This allows the public to know which members are attending in person, virtually, and, if absent, the reason for the absence. As recommended in the Brown Act, we ask that discussions be limited to agenda items. Both agencies would benefit from a careful review of the Brown Act.

By observing the workings of our local governmental entities, the LWVML appreciates the opportunity to witness Democracy in Action. Thank you, once again, to our elected officials.