

**Darien League of Women Voters (LWV)
Meeting Minutes, Wednesday, November 11th, 2020
9:00 AM Zoom Call**

Attendees:

Stephanie Maher, Evonne Klein, Martha Banks, Kate Larson, Karen McNicoll, Vicki Baldwin, Clara Sartori, Amy Zerbe, Mary Genco, Arlene Tulacro, Laurie Williamson, Carolyn Bayne, Sue Okie, Caroline Lopez, Jill McCammon and Karla Coe

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Clara Sartori at 9:03 AM.

Approval of Minutes:

Martha Banks moved and Evonne Klein seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the October 7th meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report:

Stephanie Maher reported that the bank balance as of November 2 is \$11,455.54, about the same as last month. There was some discussion regarding the \$5,000 deposit paid and not returned for the Rebecca Traister event that could not occur last June given Covid-19. The question was asked as to whether Caroline Lopez could work on a reformatted program in collaboration with the Library.

A Review of Voter Education Events Followed:

Board of Education Candidates Night October 8, 2020

Thanks were expressed to the many people who helped with this event: Primary leads Clara Sartori and Mary Genco, supported by Evonne Klein and Marcy Minnick; Timers Sue Okie, Molly Myers, Stephanie Maher, Arlene Tulacro, Betsy Shay, Nina Miller, Liz Bacon and Janet Grogan; Question Sorters Kate Larson, Shelly Skoglund and Millyn Gaaserud. The candidates appeared live but the audience was limited to 25 people, including the LWV volunteer organizers. Channel 79 provided live streaming and Vimeo.

It was noted that, with limited resources, it is efficient to hold joint events with other chapters, such as occurred with the Norwalk LWV, for statewide elections. Mention was made that a disclaimer should be on videos regarding LWV non-endorsement of candidates.

Voters' Guide

This was produced by Martha Banks and Gwen Mogenson, with technical support from Amy Zerbe and Deepika Saksena. This year the Voters' Guide was only published online, primarily on our website, and can be viewed by double clicking on darienlwv.org. In addition, the Darienite published the Voters' Guide the day before the election. The release date of the Guide was accelerated to October 8th to accommodate early absentee voting.

It was noted that we could improve our promotion of information we have prepared. Can we add posters or tweeting? A letter was sent to the Darien Times but perhaps we additionally need to advertise the availability of information we have prepared, always including the LWV disclaimer regarding the non-endorsement of candidates.

US Fourth Congressional District Candidate Debate, Jim Himes (D) vs Jonathan Riddle (R)

Thanks were given to Clara Sartori and Theresa Vogt for coordinating with the Westport LWV and working as question sorters for this debate. There were live appearances by candidates, but there was no live audience.

Voter registration at Darien High School

Thanks were expressed to Millyn Gaaserud for organizing and recruiting volunteers. This was a contact free/paperless registration drive. The CT LWV provided QR materials that students could photograph and then register online. The question was asked as to whether we can track the response via the registrars.

Social Media

Thanks were expressed to Carolyn Bayne who has tweeted our announcements, which also updates our Facebook page. We encourage members to increase our reach by retweeting Carolyn's posts.

TV 79

Thanks were expressed to Channel 79 (government public access channel). Jim Cameron and his colleagues at Channel 79 recorded and aired the Darien Board of Education debate, the Norwalk debate, and the 4th Congressional debate. He recorded more than 1000 impressions (someone opening the file) and 84 views for Candidates' Night, 110 impressions and 31 views for the Norwalk debate and 72 impressions and 11 views for the 4th District Congressional debate.

Membership and Finance Drive

Jill McCammon reported that our annual membership and finance drive are live and primarily online this year. Members can renew on our website by clicking the red Join square at the top of the home page, then following the directions on how to pay dues and make an additional contribution online. Some hard mail follow up will be necessary as only 50-60% of LWV emails are opened. Clara Sartori is working on stationary, and it was suggested that our efforts should include information on programs and benefits of membership targeting both renewals and new members.

The next email push will occur on November 16, followed by one after Thanksgiving. This will be followed by a paper mailing the following week which is six weeks before the deadline. Personal contact is our most effective recruiting tool.

Membership Directory

The directory flows from the membership drive. We plan to move the membership directory online on our website with user passwords required. The content information is readily available. Theresa Vogt has volunteered to assist, and Vivian Liu has offered to help.

Programs as Reported by Clara Sartori and Evonne Klein

The Darien LWV partnered with Everwell to sponsor a series of evening discussions related to educating voters on election topics. An email from Abby Knott, Co-founder of Everwell, is attached describing the program and future plans.

The Songs of the Suffragists Program is to be sponsored by the Darien Library and the LWV of Darien. It was recommended by Ann Ferris, whose daughter was instrumental in creating and promoting the program which features a video of the songs of the suffrage movement, and reflects the mood of the country from 1850 to the present. The video explains the origins of the LWV nationally and details the connection between the LWV and other activist movements. The library has suggested several dates for the program via Zoom. It was agreed that the evening of Thursday, Dec 3rd or Wednesday, Dec 9th at 7:00 PM would be best.

The Fairfield County Community Foundation requests that the Darien LWV consider co-sponsoring a program featuring a non-partisan series of discussions called "Future of Darien", This will align with conversations in other area towns about the future of Fairfield County. The Darien Library has been asked to co-sponsor and may do so, depending on scheduling. It was agreed that this is an opportunity to partner with an organization and be part of an important conversation and learn about activities in other communities. The program will be free and via Zoom. Topics include economic concerns about the state and is a discussion guided by a facilitator for 4 to 6 conversations with a December or January launch. An email from Stephen Saloom of the Fairfield County Community Foundation is attached describing the proposal.

Food for Thought

Karla Coe reported that this discussion will continue via Zoom starting December 17th, the third Thursday.

Announcements / Reminders

Clara Sartori reported that there will not be a December monthly meeting. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, January 6 at 9:00 AM via Zoom.

Motion to Adjourn;

Karen McNicoll moved and Amy Zerbe seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:55 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Vicki Baldwin, Secretary

November 11th Minutes E-mail Attachments (#1 Abby Knott of Everwell) (#2 Stephen Saloom of Fairfield County Community Foundation)

#1- Abby Knott of Everwell

To the DWLV,

Unfortunately I'm unable to make this morning's meeting, but I'm happy to have the opportunity to share an update with you on Everwell's *What Do I Think?* series!

We were so grateful to have had the partnership and support of the DLWV (and the Campaign School at Yale) for Everwell's six-week *What Do I Think?* series, which just wrapped up on Nov 2. As a group, we heard from experts in the fields of healthcare, social justice, education, the economy, immigration and the environment. We also discussed media literacy and conflict resolution, which we felt were important pieces of this conversation. (Details on speakers below.)

As you may remember, the program was hosted by Gabrielle Schonder. An Everwell member, Gabrielle is an Emmy-Award-winning PBS reporter and journalist and covers the White House.

We took on the *What Do I Think?* series about politics because we believed there was a piece missing from the political puzzle for many of us. It's the place that comes before the party lines, the conflict, and the voice of others. It's the place about forming one's own opinions. And our goal was to help our participants feel more firm in their opinions on the issues discussed in the series. We are thrilled to share that we met our goal; the series was a success and we received positive feedback

from participants. With over 90 registered attendees, we felt we built a community around these important issues and created a safe space for participants to listen and be heard.

One of our important learnings was around the non-partisan aspect of the series. We knew going into this series that contrasting political opinions can cause deep, inner discomfort. But through Everwell's programming platform, we are striving to create a safe space to discuss these issues fairly by opening ourselves to new learning and various perspectives. Now that the series has wrapped, perhaps "non-partisan" was not the best word choice, although it was entirely the intent. Moving forward, we will adjust the language about the "What Do I Think?" series by describing it as looking at issues from various political standpoints to create a balanced approach to the discussion, so *that* participants can further develop their own opinions.

We worked extensively to identify speakers who are not only experts in their fields, but who are also on the front lines of their industries. As you know, we also specifically underscored the nonpartisan nature of the discussion in our preparation, a format to which they all whole-heartedly understood and agreed. That said, we learned that for those who are not journalists, it is difficult for experts to separate entirely from their personal political lenses, and we can't completely control what the speakers choose to say in a live interview. We promised to deliver a balanced point of view, and by having Gabrielle facilitate with her strict editorial standards as a journalist, we felt comfortable inviting these renowned experts.

With these learnings in mind, we are excited to share that we are keeping this conversation going! We plan to continue our *What Do I Think?* series with the continued leadership of Gabrielle Schonder by looking at even more issues from various political standpoints to create a balanced approach to the discussions, so that participants can further develop their own opinions. We look forward to sharing more details with The League in late 2020.

For your reference, here is a list of the experts that were featured in this series:

Workshop Dates + Topics:

Week 1 - September 28 | 7:30-9pm EST

Intros, Primer to Politics, Media Literacy + Guns

Guest Expert: Patti Russo, Executive Director of [The Campaign School at Yale](#)

Week 2 - October 5 | 7:30-8:30pm EST

Healthcare + COVID

Guest Expert: Dr. Sejal Hathi, M.D., M.B.A., Primary Care Doctor at Massachusetts General

Hospital, Clinical Fellow on the faculty of Harvard Medical School + Host of the [CivicRX podcast](#)

Week 3 - October 12 | 7:30-8:30pm EST

Social Justice: Race + Gender Equality

Guest Experts: [Dr. Khalilah Brown-Dean](#), Associate Professor of Political Science at Quinnipiac University + author of *Identity Politics in the United States* + [Gretchen Carlson](#), American Journalist + author of *Be Fierce: Stop Harassment and Take Your Power Back*

Week 4 - October 22 | 7:30-8:30pm EST

Education + Affordable Housing

Guest Experts: [Russlynn Ali](#), Co-Fonder + CEO of XQ Institute + Anika Singh Lemar, J.D., Clinical Associate Professor at Yale Law School

Week 5 - October 26 | 7:30-8:30pm EST

The Economy + Immigration

Guest Expert: Thea M. Lee, President of the Economic Policy Institute

Week 6 - November 2 | 7:30-9pm EST

The Environment + Conflict Resolution + Inspiration to Vote Tomorrow

Guest Experts: Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, marine biologist, policy expert, writer. CEO of Ocean Collectiv, founder of Urban Ocean Lab+ Co-Editor of All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis+ Katie Rowen, SVP + General Counsel at an international public company + Conflict Resolution Expert

Thank you again for your support and partnership!

Best,

Abby Knott

#2- Stephen Saloom of Fairfield County Community Foundation

Subject: "Future of Darien" - Community discussion concept

Dear Ms. Lopez and Ms. Sartori,

I recently met Evonne Klein and we talked about the series of *non-partisan* policy discussions Fairfield County's Community Foundation (FCCF) would like to support across the county.

It's long been recognized that Connecticut's demographics are skewing older, and its economic strength weaker. Fairfield County has not proven immune to either, although the median age in Darien is younger than the average. Now COVID increases the challenges and uncertainty we all face. FCCF feels it is precisely the time to help our Fairfield County communities discuss among themselves how they can build the future they'd like.

These conversations would be centered in Fairfield County Libraries, which serve as the primary "marketplace of ideas" or "town square" in our towns in the modern era. This series would encourage each town to focus on the future it would like to see – and work toward – for itself. Together, we think of these discussions as "The Future of Fairfield County" series.

This idea has been developed a bit through experiences in some neighboring towns. It began to hatch last winter, when my Board Chair and I (both from Ridgefield, it turns out) began speaking with the Ridgefield Library about convening a series of community conversations about the future of our town. Soon afterward, I was coincidentally invited to present in a League-sponsored discussion series on racial attitudes in Redding. There was great excitement at the end of that series, yet the COVID shutdowns literally began later that week, and both efforts paused.

(Interestingly, when I reached out to League officer and former Mark Twain Library Board Member Mary Ann Carman about the Redding series, she told me that many of the participants had broken into subgroups and continued to meet and focus on specific issues virtually since late spring.)

When I recently met Evonne, we ended up talking about the possibility of "The Future of Darien" series, sponsored by the League of Women Voters and FCCF at the Darien Library. She recommended I reach out to you. A rough idea of the arc of such a series might be:

- Introducing the idea and surveying all participants' hopes for what Darien's future;
- Inviting a key leader from the CT Department of Economic and Community Development and/or the Governor's Workforce Council and/or Business community to discuss the economic and demographic forecasts for Connecticut, and the best recommendations they've gleaned

for our future success, followed by group discussion of the top priority areas to discuss about Darien's future;

- A short series of expert presentations on each of those issues, followed by topic-focused discussions about what Darien might want explore/pursue on each;

This would therefore be ~4-6 discussions. To some extent, the discussions are both a means to an end and an end in themselves. This effort would not take responsibility for follow through on any idea, yet it could well foster the individuals and/or public discussion that serve as launching pads for organic efforts by Darien residents to pursue the issues they're interested in, in the ways they'd like.

At bottom, the goal would be public discussion and civic engagement – wherever it may lead. These seem to be consistent with your organizations' goals, as well as that of mine. I would be very pleased to discuss this idea with you, adapt it as appropriate, and possibly co-launch such a series with you.

At your convenience, please let me know your thoughts and I'd be happy to proceed from there.

Thank you for your consideration,
Stephen