

LWV-Kitsap Bremerton/CK Unit Meeting Notes--Saturday, November 20, 2021

Kitsap United Way Conference Room/Zoom

In person: NK Member Carol Larsen, John Cervinsky, Maureen Cervinsky, Janice McLemore, Connie Marchant, Candy Rankin, Raejean Bridges-Avalos, Amanda Rodgers, Kathleen Cahall, Debi Barner
Via Zoom: Gail Sackman, Debbie Klabo, Pat Troxell

Maureen asked Carol Larsen to come talk to us about **LWV-K's Observer Corps**, which had existed in a different form a number of years ago. In that model, our local league followed all state-recommended rules, which involved filling out a very extensive form. It just got too complicated and the effort faded away. A recent resurgence of interest in restarting an Observer Corps prompted Carol to come up with a plan to make participation as simple as possible. She worked with Alicia Vause to create an easy way to submit a report online.

On the League's webpage www.lwv-kitsap.org click on Menu > Advocacy > Observer Corps. You will find Guidelines, a list of Kitsap County agencies & their websites/meeting days & times, the simple form for submitting an Observer report, and reports already submitted by members of the Observer Corps.

The goal of the Observer Corps is to keep track of what happens in the various governmental entities of Kitsap County, i.e., city/county/regional/public health/school districts/parks & recreation/ports/water districts/planning commissions. The League believes that the presence of Observers makes a statement that the community is watching the process of government, thereby keeping officials attentive to their jobs and promoting transparency and accountability. Observers can learn if the agency complies with open meeting laws and if it allows opportunities for public comment prior to reaching a decision on an issue.

Many governmental agencies conduct study sessions, when much of the nuts and bolts of issues are worked through prior to the actual meeting, when those previously discussed issues may be part of the consent agenda and simply voted up or down with little or no further discussion. Those study sessions are usually open to the public, as well.

A member who wishes to participate in the Observer Corps chooses an agency near her/his home or one of particular interest and attends meetings to listen, learn, observe and report back to the League with factual information about the proceedings and any information about which the Board may be interested. The Observer can also watch for issues on which the League may wish to take action/speak out.

A member could partner with someone else to observe the same agency and the two could alternate attending the meetings and submitting a report

A key rule is that Observers do not speak or participate in the meeting being observed.

The Observer should wear an LWV-Kitsap name tag or logo pin and introduce her/himself at the first meeting the Observer attends. It helps to check on the entity's website ahead of time to access the agenda for the upcoming meeting. Many meetings are still being held via Zoom and most are recorded.

When an Observer report is submitted, Carol reviews it to ensure nonpartisan content and then forwards it to the Board and makes it available to the LWV-K website and The Kitsap Voter monthly newsletter.

Currently four members are attending meetings regularly & submitting Observer reports:

Martha Burke: Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council

Judy Tallman: Kitsap County Board of Commissioners

Barbara Paul: Poulsbo City Council

Catherine Ahl: North Kitsap School Board

Many thanks to Carol for leading the charge on this important advocacy tool for community engagement and for coming to tell us about the program and how to get involved.

Maureen pulled up our Bremerton/CK unit page on the LWV-Kitsap website. She showed us the downloaded booklets entitled *Know Your County* (2005) and *Know Your City: Bremerton* (2006). Researched & put together by LWV-Kitsap, these are informational booklets about the structure and function of the two governmental entities, as well as history, services and education districts. They are very thorough, but some sections are out of date at this point. We believe the booklets were probably distributed via Welcome Wagon channels, as well as the libraries and government offices.

Since 2019 when this Bremerton/CK unit was newly reformed, we have focused on learning and becoming knowledgeable about our community. In keeping with that focus, we have talked about contacting the public information officers of the various government offices should we wish to research and write some updates for the two pamphlets. It's possible the county/city may have more current brochures available online. As a starting point, Raejean said she would be willing to make contact by phone or in person concerning some of the pamphlets' sections, probably following up via email. Any resulting changes/additions we contribute could be digital, to be posted on a special page of the League website.

Pat said she learned a lot about Bremerton history when she moved to the West Park area in 2014. She researched and wrote up a brief history of the area for herself and the other residents of her apartment complex. West Park was originally assigned only to white workers for PSNS and that segregation law was kept in force until 1966. Civil rights activism in this area began as a result of that discriminatory law. Pat suggested others might enjoy learning about and chronicling the history of the particular area of Kitsap County they live in.

Maureen gave a debrief of our League's candidate forums for the General Elections cycle. Five of the ten contested positions were within our unit's geographical area. All the forums were recorded and could be viewed later on YouTube. For the most part, more people viewed the real-time Zoom forums than would have attended in-person; and certainly with the YouTube viewers added in, we had many more views than would have been the case had the forums been held in-person only. The Bremerton mayoral race attracted by far the largest number of viewers: 51 the evening of the forum itself + 279 on YouTube, for a total of 330 total views.

Maureen talked about the difficult logistics of conducting a hybrid forum: each panelist would require a computer, for one. The forum could be streamed, recorded & viewed at a later date.

Pat stressed the importance of continuing to have streaming capability for the forums. Speaking as someone with a disability and for whom transportation options are limited, she said she and others with disabilities would likely not be able to attend candidate forums in person. Because all our forums were accessible via Zoom, she logged on to every one and gave reports to her neighbors.

Next year's electoral races will primarily take place at the state and federal level and will not involve as many local candidate forums. The big one in our area will be the Kitsap County Auditor's race. State Senator Emily Randall, U.S. Rep. Derek Kilmer, and U.S. Senator Patty Murray are all planning to run again to retain their seats.

Ongoing redistricting efforts continue for federal, state, county and city districts.

Following our business meeting, we helped ourselves to quiche, fruit, baked goods, nuts, juice & coffee! JD Sweet & Elizabeth Blandin, our guests at our September 18 unit meeting, graciously joined us for our second discussion of *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo.

As part of our wide-ranging discussion, we asked how LWV-Kitsap and/or our Bremerton/CK unit can be more inclusive. Elizabeth said for a person of color looking at LWV and asking herself if that organization would be for her, the answer would be probably not. What do we have to offer to others who are not white women? If they don't see a need, they will put their energy somewhere else.

Rather than trying to recruit persons of color to our organization, Elizabeth suggested offering a partnership with other BIPOC organizations that have similar interests. Possibilities: Helping to advocate for marginalized groups by holding elected officials accountable for promises made to those groups when they were campaigning; jointly presenting forums with diverse communities (Black, Latinx, AAPI [Asian-American & Pacific Islander]) addressing issues of common interest.

JD and Elizabeth stressed that BIPOC want action; they don't need or want more talking. If our focus is on getting out the vote, we need to come up with a specific plan of how we could partner with a BIPOC organization. The approach to the organization could be: here's what we're thinking, it could look like this, we would appreciate your feedback.

The Bremerton City Council formed the Race Equity Advisory Committee in July, 2020. Leslie Daugs is the current chairperson. Maureen may invite Leslie to come talk with our unit about the committee's focus and what its accomplishments have been over the past sixteen months.

We very much appreciate JD & Elizabeth taking time out on a Saturday morning to come help us move beyond our white-centered lens and to understand the vital importance of intent vs. impact in our interactions with diverse community members.

OUR NEXT UNIT MEETING: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2021 @ 10AM

**Guests will be: Dr. Erin Prince, Superintendent, Central Kitsap School District
and Doug Newell, Executive Director, Business & Operations, CKSD**

Attend in person at United Way, 645 Fourth St. in Bremerton or via Zoom

Recorded by Candy Rankin