



# Suffolk County Voter

[www.lwv-suffolkcounty.org](http://www.lwv-suffolkcounty.org) Box 1440, Stony Brook, NY 11790-1440 631-862-6860  
Wednesday September 21 LWVSC Board Meeting, SCCC, 20 E.Main St., Riverhead 10:00am - 12:00noon

September 2011

## OFFICERS

**President/DPO /County Voter**  
Lisa Scott 265-2198  
[lisawscott@gmail.com](mailto:lisawscott@gmail.com)  
**1st Vice President/Webmaster**  
Adam Gaus 543-1446  
[adam.gaus@IEEE.com](mailto:adam.gaus@IEEE.com)  
**2nd Vice President**  
Barbara Jordan 324-6144  
[bjordlwvh@aol.com](mailto:bjordlwvh@aol.com)  
**Secretary**  
Naomi Epstein 324-9371  
[naepxyz@aol.com](mailto:naepxyz@aol.com)  
**Treasurer**  
Marilyn McKeown 286-1169  
[mhmckeown@verizon.net](mailto:mhmckeown@verizon.net)

## ELECTED DIRECTORS

Eileen Coblens 516 922-4988  
[ecoblens@yahoo.com](mailto:ecoblens@yahoo.com)  
**Voter Service**  
Judie Gorenstein 491-3177  
[judieL728@aol.com](mailto:judieL728@aol.com)  
Sondra Irvine 862-4042  
[fsr Irvine@hotmail.com](mailto:fsr Irvine@hotmail.com)  
Barbara Magaliff 421-2455  
[barbara\\_magaliff@gmail.com](mailto:barbara_magaliff@gmail.com)  
**Housing**  
Nancy Marr 730-6556  
[enpymarr@optonline.net](mailto:enpymarr@optonline.net)  
**Special Events, Fundraising**  
Susan Wilson 283-6549  
[sswilson@hamptons.com](mailto:sswilson@hamptons.com)

## APPOINTED DIRECTORS

Arlene Lesser 265-4384  
[alstna@verizon.net](mailto:alstna@verizon.net)  
**Legislative Committee**  
Mary McLaughlin 427-1925  
[marymclaughlin54@gmail.com](mailto:marymclaughlin54@gmail.com)  
Mary Zopf 499-0107  
[mtzopf@verizon.net](mailto:mtzopf@verizon.net)

## LEAGUE PRESIDENTS

**Brookhaven**  
Nancy Marr 730-6556  
[enpymarr@optonline.net](mailto:enpymarr@optonline.net)  
**Hamptons (Co-Presidents)**  
Glorian Berk 283-2638  
[glorianberk@aol.com](mailto:glorianberk@aol.com)  
Judi Roth 283-0759  
[rothhandj@yahoo.com](mailto:rothhandj@yahoo.com)  
**Huntington**  
Judie Gorenstein 491-3177  
[judieL728@aol.com](mailto:judieL728@aol.com)  
**Shelter Island**  
Cathy Kenny 749-1848  
[cathy\\_kenny@hotmail.com](mailto:cathy_kenny@hotmail.com)  
**Smithtown**  
Mary Zopf 499-0107  
[mtzopf@verizon.net](mailto:mtzopf@verizon.net)

## OFF-BOARD SPECIALISTS

**Budget**  
Jacqui Lofaro 537-3361  
[jacqlo@hamptons.com](mailto:jacqlo@hamptons.com)  
**Natural Resources**  
Dorothy Cappadona 549-6987  
[Doc.dot@verizon.net](mailto:Doc.dot@verizon.net)

## County Health Centers and other issues at the Suffolk County Legislature

*by Eileen Coblens and Barbara Magaliff, Portfolio Chairs*

We have been observing the Health and Human Services Committee meetings in July and August, as well as the General Session of the Suffolk County Legislature in Hauppauge on August 2. There were a number of important topics brought up at the committee meetings, such as the need for a county-wide registry for bone marrow donors and Cornell Cooperative Extension's healthy eating program, targeted at local income areas where good food choices are limited. Also there was a substantial discussion from the Suffolk County Health Department on the Suffolk County Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan. The plan is a framework

## Meeting to Redistrict Suffolk County

*by Nancy Marr*

On July 27, six of the eight committee members appointed to the Suffolk County Legislative Reapportionment Committee met with County Legislators Jon Cooper, Majority Leader, and John Kennedy, Minority Leader, and some of their aides. (Each legislator has appointed two retired judges, one representative appointed by an organization committed to the principles of voters' rights and/or the advancement of public policy, and one representative of a publicly recognized minority organization, though not all were present at this first meeting.)

Our first order of business was to seek the information we need from the United States Census, and some technical help to understand it. We learned that the request had to come from the committee itself, rather than one of the aides or legislators, who might be "partisan," so we agreed to forward the request to the County Department of Planning. We realized that we need a chairperson; Judge Gowan offered to serve, and there was no objection. He will be following up on our request for Census information, analysis and breakdowns that we need, and funding from the county for the operation of the committee (secretarial help, materials, etc.) We learned that County Legislator Andrew Crecca had used his own computer to develop redistricting plans after the 2000 Census. Judge Gowan will obtain his plans if he can. We scheduled our next meeting for a month later, August 24. After the

for monitoring the quality of water resources in Suffolk County, assessing the risks to the water supply, and determining the best way to protect water resources.

From the League's perspective, a priority is the future of the County Health Care Centers. At the July 28 Health & Human Services Committee, before the consideration of 1565-11, which would establish a County policy to ensure the full operation of all County Health Centers in 2011, Anne Kellett spoke with a plea to pass the legislation to insure those most needy and vulnerable would continue to receive health service. Mary Finnin then spoke. She repeated her plea to have the Suffolk County Legislature to declare a "public health emergency" and again, proposed that the "tobacco fund" and a \$5 per capita tax, be used fund all Suffolk County health care programs. That measure was tabled.

Also at the HHS Committee meeting on July 28, Resolution 1600-11, requiring legislative approval of any Request for Proposal for the sale of the County's Certified Home Health Agency license, was approved and will be on the agenda when the full legislature meets on August 2. This legislation is an attempt to make sure that all legally mandated procedures are followed before the sale of the home health agency.

At the August 2 General Meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature, several people spoke in favor of supporting Resolution 1600-11. Dr. Laurel Green, chair of the Public Health Nursing steering committee, presented the results of her committee's report, which collected data showing the county's usage and suggesting possible options for continuing public health care. She was assured by Legislator Romaine that any decisions

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**Redistricting** *continued*

meeting, we received an email from one of his aides listing many reference materials that will be helpful in getting prepared.

The proposal the committee presents shall provide:

- For substantially equal weight for all the voters in the allocation of representation in the Suffolk County Legislative body;
- Substantially fair and effective representation for the people of Suffolk County as organized in political parties; and
- Representation areas that are of convenient and contiguous territory in as compact form as practicable.
- No legislative district shall deviate more than 3 percent from the total population of Suffolk County divided by 18 except in those instances where a deviation of greater than 3 percent is required to meet the standards of the Voting Rights Act.

*Background:*

*Section 2 of the VRA was designed to prohibit the techniques used in the past to dilute minority voting power. It makes it illegal to draw district lines that deny minority voters an equal opportunity to “participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice,” whether this denial is intentional or an unintended result of the way lines are drawn.*

*The usual technique to protect the minority population is to draw a district so that those voters represent a majority of the voters in a “majority-minority” district.*

*Race may not be the “predominant” reason for a district’s shape, but considering race as part of the overall mix, along with race-neutral redistricting factors like political preference and community interests and geographic considerations and the like, is proper.*

**County Health Centers** *continued*

regarding the closing of health facilities would be made by the full legislature and not the County Executive alone. She was invited to appear before the Health and Human Services Committee to give a fuller presentation of her report's findings. Following the public portion, the legislature approved Resolution 1600-11 (604).

On August 11 at the Health and Human Services Committee Meeting, the important piece of legislation addressed was Resolution 1726-11. According to this resolution, the Suffolk County Executive helped bring about a \$20 million dollar reduction in State funding of Suffolk County health care centers by having “withheld critical information, which could have effected a compromise from the Suffolk County Legislature.” What Resolution 1726 aims to do is to “create its own negotiating team to continue the Article 6 talks with the New York State Department of Health.” Resolution 1726-11 will be taken up again at the September meeting of the committee.

**Update of Suffolk County Reapportionment Commission**

Our meeting for August 24 was cancelled by Legislators Cooper and Kennedy. We are waiting for the appointment of two new representatives to replace two who were not appropriate. In the meantime, Legislator Kennedy is submitting a resolution that will require the commission to elect two chairs, one from each side of the aisle. He is also asking the Legislature to provide and pay for technical assistance, again, from both sides of the aisle. It is interesting that, although we assumed that the commission would be nonpartisan, not bipartisan, it is in fact bipartisan because the majority leader (Jon Cooper) and the minority leader (John Kennedy) each appointed four members and the plan to have two chairs confirms that there will be two sides to the effort to reapportion. (Redistricting applies to congressional districts, so we are a reapportionment commission.)

In late August, the New York State Court of Appeals threw out the new boundaries for Nassau County that its GOP members had drawn up for the 19 legislative districts. The judge found that the legislators who drew up the new lines so that they would be in place before the 2011 contests failed to comply with the county charter. It calls for a three-step process - designating a commission, holding public hearings, and adopting the new boundaries at least eight months before the next general election. The actual lines were not challenged, and may be used for the 2013 election, unless there is a political change in the legislature that alters the process for drawing the lines for 2013.

*Nancy Marr*