

# The Voter

October 2021

## CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

### Hello, members and friends!

It's starting to feel like fall and the excitement of the local election season is upon us. At LWVSP we have been out in the community registering voters, planning candidate forums, recruiting Student Leaders, and hosting a three-part Learn with the League series exploring access to the polls.

As we hear news of efforts to quash voting rights and access to the polls around the country, we must remain vigilant and keep doing the next right thing. It is easy to feel disillusioned, but by taking action in our own communities we can make a difference! Part of our core mission is to educate and engage citizens. We invite you to take action by:

- Reading and sharing our 2021 Voter Guide
- Checking the calendar regularly for updates on programs and candidate forums
- Getting involved in our work by joining a committee (page 2) or volunteering (page 4)

### Membership Update

If you received an email at the end of August asking you to renew your membership, please do so! Your membership dues help support the en-



Heidi registering voters at Macalester College this summer

tire organization from the St. Paul chapter to the national office. You can renew online by logging on to our website, then following the prompts on the lower left corner. Or you can send your dues to our office at 75 5th Street West, Suite 224, St. Paul, MN 55102.

### Important Dates

**September 17 – November 1:** Early Voting Period

**In Person:** Voters can register at the early voting site: Ramsey County Elections Office, Plato Building, 90 Plato Blvd. West Saint Paul. This site

This site is open through November 1.

Additional sites open on October 26. [Check the Secretary of State website](#) for hours at Arlington Hills Community Center, Highland Golf Course, Frogtown Community Center, Ramsey County Library).

**By Mail:** Registered voters must submit a paper absentee ballot application. You cannot apply online this year for an absentee ballot. Download one at the [Secretary of State website](#) (mnvotes).

*[continued on page 7](#)*

## IN THIS ISSUE

Program and Policy News . . . . .	2
Learn With the League Programs . . . . .	3
Voter Services & Partnership . . . . .	4
Oral History: Mary Vlk . . . . .	5
Book Club News . . . . .	6
Study & Consensus Process . . . . .	10
Morning Book Club Schedule . . . . .	10

## PROGRAM NEWS

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### Candidate Forums and Rent Stabilization Debate

Join us for the following forums for candidates on the November ballot and a debate on rent stabilization. All are scheduled for 7 p.m. at the St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) Studios, 550 Vandalia Street, Suite 170.

**October 6:** St. Paul School Board candidates

**October 12:** Mayoral candidates

**October 14:** Rent stabilization debate

Seating will be limited and registration is required. Visit the [LWVSP website](#) to register. Programs will be streamed online and on SPNN television.

### Which Committee is For You? (Part 2)

The [August newsletter](#) described the committees that do much of the work of LWVSP. This month we ask what committee you'd like to join. Please complete [this survey](#) to let us know. Committee chairs and members will follow up with you in the next few months to invite you to meetings. For immediate questions, email [info@lwvsp.org](mailto:info@lwvsp.org) or contact the committee chairs.



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## POLICY AND EDUCATION

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### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the League of Women Voters

For the last few years, the League of Women Voters has been sharing modules, webinars, and other resources related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The following policy has been adopted by the Minnesota and St. Paul League of Women Voters Minnesota and League of Women Voters St. Paul:

*LWV is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.*

*There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic*

*status, language, accent, ability status, mental health, educational level or background, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, political perspective or affiliation and/or any other characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity.*

In July, the LWVSP board watched many of the webinars and discussed them at the August board meeting. We discussed putting the DEI policy on our website, reading books related to some of the topics discussed, and learning from other boards active in St. Paul. If you are interested in learning more, you can watch some of the webinars or ask an LWVSP Board member. Many DEI materials, including webinars, in are available on the national [League's Management website](#).

—Heidi Kloempken

## October Program: Youth and Generation Z Barriers to the Polls

The last in our three-part Equity and Accessibility in Voting series is scheduled for Tuesday, October 26, 7 p.m. on Zoom

Panelists will be Paul Goren, professor and chair of the Department of Political Science, University of Minnesota; Jordan Hartman a 23-year-old STEM student from Minneapolis; and Grace Rear- don, co-chair of the LWVSP Youth Vote Commit- tee.

You'll learn about voting barriers specific to young people, current Minnesota law, and ac-

tions you can take to promote excellence in voting access.

The first presentation in the Equity and Accessi- bility series, August 24, explored physical barri- ers. It's available for [replay on YouTube](#), as is the panel [discussion on language and cultural barriers](#) from September 28.

Watch the LWVSP website to register for the Oc- tober program.

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## August Recap: Physical Barriers to the Polls

*On August 24, viewers tuned in on Zoom and Facebook to hear from **Marion McCarthy**, a former League President in Detroit, now an advocate for successful aging in St Paul, and **Nikki Villavicencio**, an advocate for people with dis- abilities and Maplewood City Council member.*

*The program, cosponsored by the Roseville League, was aired by the St. Paul Neighborhood Network and Subur- ban Community Channels. It's available for [viewing on YouTube](#).*

### National and State Context

Polling place accessibility is regulated by state and federal law. As summarized on the [Minnesota Secretary of State website](#), it includes require- ments for door widths, handrails, parking and signage. The state must also provide an Automark machine for blind voters.

Some estimates suggest that as many as 30 per- cent of U.S. residents have a disability, though they might don't always identify it as such. More than three million Americans use wheelchairs and more than one million are blind.

The disability voting gap is the difference in per- centage of people with and without disabilities who vote. According to a [study by Rutgers Uni- versity](#), the gap in Minnesota was -11.2% in 2016.

It 2018, the gap expanded to -19.5%, the worst in the country. The gap shrank to -1.8% in 2020. Across the country, voting by people with dis- abilities increased in 2020, although the national disability voting gap was still -5.7% in 2020.

### Panelist Perspectives

Marion McCarthy recalled taking a bus to De- troit's City Hall to preregister to vote for the first time. She still gets a thrill remembering the how honored she felt to swear on the Bible, right hand raised. She described involving her children on election day, striving to imprint on them the re- sponsibility to vote.

Marion spoke about ways she's been challenged on voting day. Since she uses a walker to help her with balance, doors—especially heavy outside doors—can be difficult to open. Transportation can be an issue, since not all her friends have the strength to fold her walker or have the car space to include it. (She is grateful for Metro Mobility.) She also mentioned that harsh weather can pose more difficulties for those with disabilities than their able-bodied peers.

Having sufficient space to move around at the

[continued on page 7](#)

## Lynx and Timberwolves Seek to Pack the Vote

For a second year, the League is partnering with the Timberwolves and Lynx basketball teams to help people stay informed about local and national elections, provide educational voter resources, and voter support for future elections. The effort is a projects of the teams along with the St. Paul and Minneapolis Leagues, When We All Vote, and I am a voter,

Here are the program resources:

**Voter Registration portal:** An online portal helps people register to vote or check their registration status. ([vote.civcnation.org/register/packthevote/](http://vote.civcnation.org/register/packthevote/))

**Text Service:** Text the word PACK to 26797 to register or check registration status and receive reminders leading up to Election Day.

The [Pack the Vote website](http://nba.com/timberwolves/vote) ([nba.com/timberwolves/vote](http://nba.com/timberwolves/vote)) offers access to voter education, resources, and volunteer opportunities at polling sites on Election Day via Power the Polls, plus access to the voter registration portal.

**Voter Registration Sessions:** The Timberwolves and Lynx are partnering with Summit Academy OIC and the Sanneh Foundation to host registration events in Minneapolis on October 7 and Saint Paul on October 8. Volunteers from the League's Saint Paul and Minneapolis chapters will be there.

The Summit Academy OIC, a vocational school in North Minneapolis, and the Sanneh Foundation, which serves low-income and immigrant youth, are recent NBA Foundation award recipients for their work elevating Black communities through employment and career development.

When We All Vote is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization focused on increasing election participation and closing the race and age voting gap.

I am a voter.® is a nonpartisan movement aiming to create a cultural shift around voting and civic engagement by unifying around a central truth: our democracy works best when we all participate.

## Registration Event Update

Greetings LWVSP members!

I'm Joann Ellis, the new Voter Services coordinator for the St. Paul League. I'm part of a team that works to register new voters, help registered voter apply for absentee ballots, and answer a wide array of questions about the voting process.

Many organizations and community groups contact us to be at their events to provide those services. Some years are busier than others, depending on the type of elections are being held – local, state and/or national. This year St. Paul holds a local-level election for the mayor and school board members and ballot item called “City Question 1” regarding rent control.

So far this season, we've been at events in August and September and we're hoping to do more through the end of October. Many of the people we meet at these events are already registered voters, but they still have questions—perhaps about early or absentee voting or how to find out about candidates. Education is a big part of our work in Voter Services.

We are always looking for people who'd like to help staff a table at community events. We provide you with training, materials, and a volunteer buddy. Let me know if have question or would like to volunteer by [emailing me](mailto:eastsidemom16@hotmail.com) ([eastsidemom16@hotmail.com](mailto:eastsidemom16@hotmail.com)).

# ORAL HISTORY

Mary Vik has been an active LWVSP member since the mid-1980s. She has served as co-president for two terms and chair of the membership committee. She's also volunteered on the Membership, Voter Services, Environmental and Program Committees.

These are excerpts from an August 31 conversation with LWVSP board member Nona Beining.

## Meet Mary Vik

**Nona Beining:** Tell me about what first attracted you to the League?

**Mary Vik:** When I read the newspapers I always start with the sports pages, but end up on the editorial page. Back in the 1980s, LWV was often in the editorial pages, discussing issues of local importance. The letters were always reasoned, calm, and professional. I really liked that. It drew me to the League.

We should find ways to do that again. The state issues letters more than the local League, but we might get back into doing that.

I didn't join right away, though. I waited until I took an early retirement from teaching, then became an empty nester.

**NB:** How did you end up joining?

**MV:** It's that personal contact that made me join and become active. Back in the 80s, the St Paul League was rather large, maybe 250 people, and we had neighborhoods split up into units. They functioned with Unit Leaders who made calls and organized meetings. We met in someone's house every month.

Well, that first meeting, Barb Burleigh made me come to the meeting. She said she'd swing by and pick me up. I backed out the first couple times, but then I finally gave in and Barb picked me up.

I didn't really want to go to a stranger's house at night, but I got over that pretty quickly. I've been a Leaguer ever since. It's something I'd like to see us do more, although it's hard with Covid.

Book clubs bring a personal contact element back to League. They're sort of like having a unit



Mary Vik, left, with Shaun Wyche and Heidi Kloempken

meeting. I don't do Zoom meetings, so it's nice to go in person to book clubs when they meet in person. The December meeting is always nice.

We never really replaced the unit meetings – maybe due to scheduling. Homes aren't maybe as open as they used to be, and if you have more than 10 people it can get a little crowded. I don't remember when it changed, but it must have been early in my League years. Later—when we stopped the unit system, and I was on the board—I made a point of making contact with new members and offered to meet for coffee. This became something we just did so that people would see a face and realize it's a real thing.

[\*continued on page 9\*](#)

# BOOK CLUB NEWS

## The Morning Report

The morning book club met at the Como Lake Pavilion September 8 to discuss *America For Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*, by Erika Lee.

We generally agreed this was an excellent book that exposed issues we hadn't heard before. Despite being a nation of immigrants, the United States is also a nation of xenophobia. In *America for Americans*, Erika Lee shows that fear and hostility toward immigrants has been a defining feature of our nation since the colonial era. The U.S. repeatedly banned or limited immigrants from specific places, including Chinese mine workers in the late 19th century, Jewish refugees during World War II, and Iranians following the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis. Japanese immigrants were interred and Mexicans continue to be deported. Lee makes the case that xenophobia harms us all, due to the contributions that immigrants make to the U.S. economy and society.

The book spurred conversation about immigration policies in our country. While the U.S. is not in the top 10 of countries with the toughest immigration laws, we lack a consistent policy for immigrants and Congress has been reluctant to tackle this issue.

For more information on this subject, check out these resources:

- [American Immigration Council](#)
- [Council on Foreign Relations website](#)
- [Open Society Foundation](#)
- *The Guarded Gate*, book by Daniel Okrent

## Upcoming Morning Books

Our October book is *Turnout: Making Minnesota the State That Votes*, by Joan Anderson Grove, billed as “part political history and part memoir, . . . a reminder to Minnesotans to cherish and protect their tradition of clean, open elections.”

We'll meet October 13, 10:15 a.m., at Sun Ray Library, 2105 Wilson Ave., St. Paul, in the 3M Room. Masks are required regardless of vaccine status.

See page 10 for more scheduled books. [Email Mary](mailto:mgp22@msn.com) (mgp22@msn.com) with any questions.

## Evening Book Club

The group continues to meet on Zoom on the first Monday of the month, 6 p.m. Upcoming meeting dates and books:

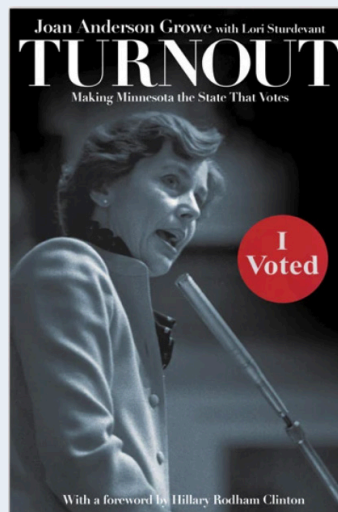
**October 4:** *Sparked: George Floyd, Racism, and the Progressive Illusion*, edited by Walter R. Jacobs, Wendy Thompson Taiwo and Amy August

**November 1:** *We Had a Little Real Estate Problem: The Unheralded Story of Native Americans & Comedy*, by Kliph Nesteroff

**December 6:** *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* by Anne Faiman

For questions or to get on the mailing list, [email Karen Williams](mailto:kare14will@gmail.com) (kare14will@gmail.com).

## Grove Book for New Members



The morning and evening book clubs are offering a gift of Joan Grove's *Turnout* to new members of the St. Paul League.

[Email Cheryl Bailey](mailto:auntdrbc@comcast.net) (auntdrbc@comcast.net) to arrange for your copy.

## Presidents' Letter continued from page 1

Return your ballot by mail or in person to multiple locations. Check [www.ramseycounty.us](http://www.ramseycounty.us) for complete list

**October 12:** Deadline for registering in advance

**October 19:** Recommended deadline to apply for an absentee ballot

**October 26:** Recommended deadline to return an absentee ballot

**November 2:** Election Day

Voters can register at the polls; proof of residence is required.

Bring current Minnesota driver's license/state

ID or a photo ID with a previous address (OK if expired) along with (1) a bill that shows current address and is due or dated within 30 days of election, or (2) rental agreement that is valid on Election Day, or (3) other acceptable proof as listed on the [Secretary of State website](http://mnvotes.org) (mnvotes.org).

**Finally,** thank you to new members who have joined since June 2021!

Kathleen Braga, Ann Commers, Katie Halling, Chris Kwong, Sue Yeager

Warmly,

Amy and Heidi

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## Physical Barriers continued from page 3

polling place is critical, Marion said, as are seating options. She noted that despite appearing able, she simply can't stand for very long and that anyone may have limitations that observers can't possibly know by looking at them.

Mail-in voting has been a godsend for Marion, who appreciates the time to review the ballot and fully consider the candidates. She urged viewers to realize the importance of planning to get the ballot mailed with plenty of time for tabulation. (To request an absentee ballot from Ramsey County, call 651-266-2171.)

Nikki Villavicencio talked to viewers about her first voting experience as a college student in Wisconsin. She was energized by all the students in line for the Kerry/Bush election, with local restaurants handing out pizza slices and her fellow voters being excited by the whole process.

She taught viewers that disability is truly an intersectional concept, affecting people in all cultures, religions, and nations. In general, she says, people prefer terms with individual-first styles, such as "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people." She mentioned that we no longer use the word "handicapped," as the word

comes from people asking for a handout. Clearly the term "cripple," with its negative institutional connotation, is not appropriate.

Nikki uses a wheelchair for mobility due to a condition that has fused her joints. She advocates for people with disabilities being as a positive, dynamic group that has as much to contribute as anyone. When she was elected to the Maplewood City Council in January 2021, she saw herself as a bridge between the community and government.

Nikki is a strong advocate for no-excuse mail-in ballots, making Election Day a national holiday, voting at the polling place from one's car, and the Automark machine. All these options benefit the elderly, the blind, and people with mobility issues.

Nikki, who has done plenty of door knocking, said that going to apartments for those with disabilities has been especially rewarding: "They were so excited to get registered, and they had never been asked."

An Automark ballot machine is required at all polling places. Blind users don headphones and listen to the ballot choices. Nikki recommend-

*continued on page 8*

## **Physical Barriers continued from page 7**

ed the [The Blind Voter Experience](#), a short YouTube video with helpful information on using Automark machine and how to advocate for the right to vote if a polling place has no machine or a non-functioning one. Any method using paper and pen is a barrier for the blind.

Sighted people also use the Automark, which change languages and font sizes, making it ideal for those with low vision or English as a second language. Once the ballot choices are made, the machine prints the ballot, and the voter uses a privacy envelope to insert the ballot into the voting machine along with the rest of the voters.

When asked about an ideal polling place, Nikki said that nearby public transit is key. Since many polling places are in building with multiple entrances, she noted the importance of clear signs designating parking closest to the accessible door. For buildings with heavy doors and no electric openers, she recommends that doors be propped open or have an attendant nearby to open them. The polling booth itself should have an Automark machine, afford privacy, and be big enough that a wheelchair can turn in a circle.

If the space is too limited, as one viewer who works as an election judge noted, Nikki recommended reaching out to the local elected officials to point out the size as a barrier, in hopes of finding a more disability-friendly polling place.

She hopes for the eventual use of senior buildings and low-income apartment lobbies as polling places, but recognizes that inviting the general public into a residential setting could pose security problems.

Marion agreed with Nikki and urged us all to let election judges know if we observe accessibility issues at a polling place. This is the only way they will know there are problems to be solved.

As well as advocate for fully accessible polling places, the panelists urged us all to rally behind voting from home and registering both physically and developmentally disabled people to vote.

Parting thoughts from the panelists:

Marion McCarthy:

**“John Lewis always reminded us that voting is precious and sacred.”**

Nikki Villvicencio:

**“If you’re not in our [disability] community now, you may be fortunate enough to be in our community someday!”**

—Cheryl Bailey

The Voter is published every other month by the League of Women Voters St. Paul. To submit suggestions or news, [contact Diane Hellekson](mailto:dianereally@hotmail.com) (dianereally@hotmail.com).



## Mary Vlk continued from page 5

When I was new, at a unit meeting, we were discussing the City Council election. I thought I could find out what other unit members thought about these candidates. We sat there for the first 10 minutes just visiting, but then I brought up “what do you think about this candidate?” and I was told immediately “Mary, this is an official League meeting, we do not discuss the pros and cons of partisan issues.” I guess I had heard the word non-partisan, but they really meant what they said. They were very nice about it, but they were serious about this non-partisan idea.

My sister joined in Willmar [MN], and she said “Mary, this is just a bunch of Democrats,” and I let her know that the issues on the League studies are those that, yes, Democrats might favor, but they’re not partisan issues. You really have to give yourself time to understand how serious the League is and how important the work is.

**NB:** *In addition to the personal connection, what other parts of League do you think are important?*

**MV:** We don’t do studies anymore—there isn’t an appetite for it. They take a long time—two years. It’s tough to find someone to be a chair of the studies. But if someone is interested in public service, this type of work is great. Ruby Hunt—[former] City Council and Ramsey County Board member—said that League prepared her to serve in government because of the studies we did. (See page 10 for more on the LWV study process)

**NB:** *Tell me about your experience with CMAL— the Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues*

I was asked by the White Bear LWV to join CMAL as secretary. I wasn’t on the LWV SP board. CMAL’s board is populated by members of area Leagues. It wasn’t a huge commitment, just four times a year. I did two or three terms. It was so interesting to me. CMAL is an Inter-League Organization and through it, League members work to address governmental issues of metropolitan concern. The Metropolitan Council is appointed by the governor and conducts studies. It’s an

unelected group of people with a lot of power. I hadn’t known anything about the Metropolitan Council up to that point.

I enjoyed the time on CMAL, as well as going to LWV conventions. I really urge people to go to conventions and participate in CMAL if they get a chance. You meet other League people and learn about how other Leagues are run. (See sidebar.)

It’s not purely social. It’s work, and the meetings and studies take thinking and discussion. CMAL did a study a couple years ago. The St. Paul meeting was supposed to vote on consensus on this study, and it was confusing as to whether the process of consensus was actually followed. Consensus is not an up or down, majority rules process. It needs to have all points discussed and decided. They’re long boring meetings, but you know at the end that you have studied an issue thoroughly and have an opinion that’s very considered. Consensus is really important and we need to make sure we hold to the principles. (See sidebar.)

**NB:** *What advice would you give someone looking to get more involved?*

**MV:** I just say to people, “join the board, if you feel overwhelmed, don’t get discouraged. They’ll help you find the ropes.” But we really need to explain the League to people, and the Board needs to make sure we keep talking about what League is and how important it can be to make a difference in our communities.

### Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues

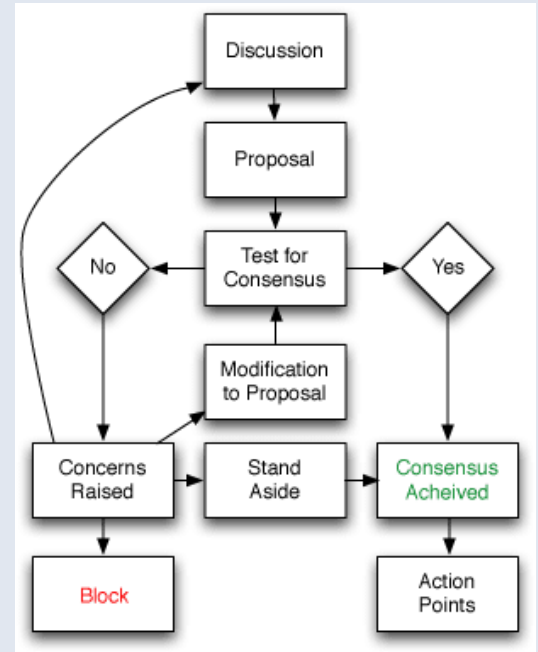
CMAL is an Inter-League Organization (ILO) made up of local LWV members in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Founded more than 50 years ago, CMAL studies and educates the public on issues and concerns specific to the Twin Cities region. During the 2018 Minnesota Legislative Session, new governance structure for Met Council was proposed. CMAL studied the new structure and updated the position in April 2019.

## The League Study & Consensus Process

The LWV takes action on an issue only when we've established a position addressing it. If the members have not studied and come to consensus, the League has no position and therefore cannot take action.

Studies—national, state, or local—follow a defined process lasting one to three years, during which we thoroughly pursue facts and details, pros and cons, and come to a consensus about policy.

1. Study committee members fashion consensus questions that are posed the membership as part of a study kit, which may include articles, books, videos, data charts and graphs, and suggested speakers. Members may use the kit within their community to better understand the issue.
2. Consensus is a decision-making process that seeks substantial agreement among members. Often this happens over the course of several meetings, and it may include surveys and other methods. If the members reach consensus, the board forms recommended positions based on the consensus, then submit them to the study committee.
3. The study committee reviews the submissions. It works to form a consensus statement - the statement resulting from the consensus questions - that becomes a recommended position.
4. That recommended position is then reviewed and voted on by our members (usually by delegates at our Convention). The proposal may be approved, amended, or be rejected at that time.



For more info, explore these links:

- [St Paul League Issues and Advocacy page](#)
- [Manitowoc, Wisconsin, League study on poverty and addiction](#)
- [National League study guidelines](#)

## Morning Book Club Schedule

Starting in November, meetings will be held at the Highland Park Library, 1974 Ford Parkway, St .Paul.

Month	Title	Author	Lead	Description
October 2021	Turnout: Making Minnesota the State that Votes	Joan Growe	Sally	High voter turnout in Minnesota is no accident. It arose from various traditions and has been sustained by wise election policies.
November	The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector's Story	Hyeonseo Lee	Sharon	A view of life under one of the world's most ruthless and secretive dictatorships – and the story of a woman's struggle guide her family to freedom.
December	The Fight to Vote	Michael Waldman	Claudia D.	By the president of the Brennan Center, the leading organization on voter rights and election security, this book is newly revised to cover today's intense fights over voting.
January 2022	The Heart of Business: Leadership Principles for the Next Era of Capitalism	Hubert Joly	Cheryl B.	Hubert Joly shares insights that reprioritize purpose, people, and profit. A guide for leaders and companies preparing to pivot toward serving all stakeholders in a new "inclusive capitalism."