

2025-01-25 Annual LVW Meeting Minutes (Zoom)

The League of Vermont Writers held its Annual general membership meeting via Zoom on January 25, 2025, president Caryn Connolly presiding. The meeting began at 11:05.

Thirty two people were in attendance, in alphabetical order were: Shawn Anderson, Cristie Arguin, Marjanna Barber-Dubois, Alyssa Berthiaume, Amy Braun, Thomas Carroll, Caryn Connolly, Susan Davis, Jared Florance, Pat Goudey O'Brien, Joan Grant, Lisa Halvorsen, Erin Hunt, Jerry Johnson, Ben Johnson, Melissa Lindberg, George Longenecker, Marilyn McDowell, Melinda Meyer, Kyle Munderville, Hank Parker, Don Peabody, Melissa Powling Mears, Rhonda Richard, Celia Ryker, Inge Schaefer, Inge Schaefer, Heather Schneider, Robert Slocum, and Gail Wind.

Caryn gave president's remarks. She said we have about 133 members, but some may not be current with their dues. Last year we only had 14 attend the annual meeting. This year we had 26 sign-ups; with 23 actually in the meeting.

She mentioned that due to the increased attendance, she felt encouraged that interest and participation in the League was increasing also.

She mentioned our Spring Event which featured Dawn Reno Langley who spoke on "The Ups and Downs of Publishing" and Jennifer Wilkov who presented a workshop called "'Pitch your Project Like a Pro.'" In the summer, Katharine Sands presented a workshop, "Getting Ready, Getting Read, Getting Readers" at the Delta Hotel in Burlington. Caryn said she felt around 20 people attended the workshop. Then, two days later, we held the League Biennial Event, Writers Meet Agents. At this event hopeful would-be authors presented over 100 pitches to five agents. In November, Ann Dávila Cardinal presented "The Socially Acceptable Stereotype: Writing the New Seniors."

Caryn shared that all the members of the board with the exception of Pat Goudey O'Brien were planning to step down and were not open to re-election. At this point, we did not have a slate of nominees to vote for, so all of the current board members have agreed to stay on for three months while we seek new leadership. We need people to step forward to keep the League alive. Caryn will be the immediate past president.

Pat mentioned that there was a question in the chat, asking if LVW was in debt. Pat said that we are not in debt. On the contrary, we have a modest bank account, but it is sufficient to see us move forward.

Caryn then outlined the need for the League to follow current state laws regarding Unemployment Insurance registration. We need to register with the UI department.

Another question came up regarding grant funding. Caryn said that LVW was not currently a grant recipient, but that it would be nice to have a board member focus on grant funding. She mentioned that local colleges are open to help us get interns.

Caryn said that board members are volunteers and receive no stipends. They do get to attend League events for free. She said she would be glad to help anyone who wanted to step up into the board.

Hank asked if we were in trouble. Caryn said, not financially. We are in trouble because we don't have anyone to step up into the board, and we would have no one to run the League.

Caryn said that if we can't fill the board positions, we might have to hire an attorney and disband. She asked Mel if that was the case. Mel responded that her initial brief research suggested that a non-profit would be advised to hire an attorney to disband. But if we disbanded, any funds would need to be turned over to another non-profit.

Caryn said that some people have voiced an interest in volunteering to increase membership. Pat mentioned that our “interim time” is for creating this board and that discussion of disbanding is premature.

Gail Wind made a motion to have another meeting in April and in the interim work to find people to fill the board. Caryn asked for discussion. Alyssa Berthiaume said that the motion was premature and she suggested that Caryn go back to her meeting agenda before we pick a date to meet again.

Caryn asked Gail if she wanted to speak. Gail asked if anyone present was willing to step up to the board in any position. Caryn said this was not the time to ask this. Gail suggested that it was necessary to know this as this was our annual membership meeting and its primary purpose was to elect the new board. She said that if there were no nominees, then we needed to know if the current board is willing to stick around for another two months or if we are all walking away.

Don Peabody raised a point of order. There was a motion made but no second and we are discussing a motion that technically, legally not exist.” Gail withdrew the motion.

Caryn asked Gail if she had anything to share that was not asking people to speak out of turn.

Gail said that as secretary, she takes the minutes. In 2023, she voluntarily took over making changes to Wild Apricot, to our website, the Newsletter and so forth. She said she is willing to continue doing these things for another 2-3 months. She mentioned she was one day out of surgery and apologized for sounding strange. She said she would like some help.

Pat Goudey O’Brien shared a bit of the history about the League and what it does.

She’s been involved in the League since 1981 and her mother was in the League since 1969. She shared some of her recollections. “One thing was that there was a regular, active newsletter that provided an opportunity for us to ‘toot our horns.’ She said that there was a League members’ activities and credits section in every newsletter and people got to say what they were doing professionally, or actively giving classes, publishing, lecturing, a new book is out, got a job a new in publishing.

There were also sections for opportunities to place your writing somewhere. We did contests, and awards that were open for different genres and we let people know where to go to apply to put their writing out in the world.

She said, “We also got a writing credit if we contributed something to the newsletter.” She said these were things we did that if you volunteered, you also got something out of it.

Pat explained that LVW did four events per year. We had a lot of big-name presenters, and we brought value to our people. She said that Zoom meetings were fine, and during the pandemic they were necessary, but that in-person events where we could sit with some of these special people was a real plus. She said these events always brought money in to the League. She said, “We ran workshops, all over the state. One person was in charge of the workshop for all different topics. The person in charge found the venue, invited the speaker, and ran the workshop.”

She offered to stay on the board and teach people how to do these things.

Mel mentioned that every other year, the League puts on Writers Meet Agents, which is a great opportunity for attendees to shmooze with these people who are so important to a writer’s career.

Pat said that the League is very well thought of in the publishing world.

Amy, our past president said she will be an event volunteer. She has many connections to help with this. Board members meet virtually and plan our four seasonal events and get admission free.

Mel Meyers gave the treasurer's report. She said she is not a professional treasurer, but she did her best to keep up with the finances.

She shared that we have 11,845 in our checking account, 25.00 in savings. Our website maintenance was fairly expensive and the speaker costs for the Writers Meet Agents was our largest expense. We still have 1584.40 in the PayPal account.

Gail shared that she contacted QuickBooks and they refunded us \$1,235.00 on January 24th, 2025. So, the total in the treasury is 14,689.00.

Alyssa moved to accept the treasurer's report. Don Peabody seconded the motion. The motion carried. [Per Robert's Rules, this was an unnecessary procedure. According to Robert's Rules of Order, the assembly doesn't need to formally accept a treasurer's report unless it's an annual report that needs to be audited. Instead, the report should be noted as received for filing.]

Alyssa moved to waive reading the minutes aloud. Amy seconded the motion. Motion carried. Caryn scrolled the minutes for membership to read.

Amy moved to accept the minutes unless there be any substantive corrections or additions. Alyssa seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Shawn said the book group has been operating for the last year. It meets every other month and discusses books about writing craft. He is planning to continue the Book Group into 2025. The next Book Group night would be February 13, 2025 (Free Zoom Event) to discuss *The Creative Act: A Way of Being* by Rick Rubin.

He said that he was the 'Covid' president. During that time, we went from 100% in person events to 100% virtual events overnight. He said we lost the newsletter** due to 'political problems.' He shared that he is now agented and out for submission and that he thanked the league for bolstering his career and that was partly due to his volunteering. He is hopeful for the future of the League and suggested that volunteering is a great opportunity, not just a burden. We have a lot of things to discuss. We need to go into this new era as an opportunity to rebuild the League in a new way. We need to look into attracting new and younger writers and published Vermont writers. We opened a discord account, but enrollment was low. We need to invest in both in-person programming, but think about virtually, how we can grow our membership. We need to build the new board, and foster volunteering so we can spread the workload more evenly.

Ally Berthiaume spoke, and said that just replacing board members with anyone who is willing is putting the cart before the horse. She said she thought we had deeper issues within the organization than who is going to be the next face of leadership. Some of the things we used to do no longer work. Our membership needs to shift. Recruitment needs to happen, because you need lots of people to not just to fill the board, but to lead the initiative, such as a programming committee, grant seeking, membership recruitment, getting younger people involved, interns, book clubs, workshops. There are lots of ideas, lots of potential.

She suggested that we are not in touch with our standing membership and she said she didn't think we know what the people are looking for who are members, and we don't know what people would want in a writing organization who don't know about us, so we could attract them. She suggested that we need an 'interim year' (not an interim meeting or quarter) to re-imagine and re-envision the league and to do market research, to tap into the local community and find out what they

would expect from a writing organization. Do they want virtual all the time? Covid forced us into that, but maybe now we need something more hybrid.

She talked about the website needing a makeover, to encourage more people to join.

Her recommendation was to perhaps work with a consultant, or maybe get some of the previous officers who are willing to help plan what the League will look like going forward. She feels that the League should reimburse these people in some way. She said we need to take another look at the bylaws and include language for situations like this where there is no slate. Perhaps rethinking quorum size and the officers' terms so there is a staggered system and we aren't electing a whole new board every year.

She suggested we consider getting a paid Executive Director, a paid position where the board works with them, but a dedicated person who is being reimbursed for time and energy. She said "I just don't think the old model is working and I think we need to hit the pause button and re-imagine LVW."

Caryn said that though Allie's suggestions are great, we still need to "slap a Band-Aid" on it for now because the current board is not willing to stay. There needs to be governing officers while all the rest of this is going on. She said that if she stayed on as president, she would be committing to three years.

Joan Grant said that only board members at large commit to three years, the officers are elected for one-year terms.

Gail started to say, "I think what she means..." and Caryn said, "We'll get to you in a minute."

Gail then shared the following thoughts:

1. She had wanted to make a motion to plan ahead for an April meeting *because* she felt that in eight weeks, we could contact all the people who have shown an interest in volunteering for LVW in any capacity and probably build a new slate of nominees.

2. She was going to stay on as secretary for two or three months and then, stay on to help the new secretary settle in as needed.

3. She was going to offer to have open meetings at least once a month for anyone who could attend, to encourage this interest.

4. She explained that during her two years as secretary, she had produced the League standard of eight quarterly newsletters. She had sponsored a small writing challenge. She had included in each of the newsletters a "Kudos Korner," a space for members to, as Pat said, "toot their horn."

5. She had applied to the international publications database for an ISSN for the *League Lines* and it was assigned.

6. She explained that the League pays 75.00 per month for Wild Apricot, (Which is not the host of our website; that is Eternity). Wild Apricot is a platform that we use to list our events, keep track of our membership and send out emails. She said that she *had intended to offer a motion*, "To ask our web host to add a bar at the top of each of our web pages, where interested people can enter their email to receive our emails." That way, people didn't need to become a member at first to be informed of our activities and programs.

7. She said she was going to offer to personally email all the people in our archived contacts (approximately 500) and invite them to come back via email sign-up. She said that we can send out 250 emails at a time for this 75.00 a month price. If we went beyond that, the WA price would go to 140.00.

Caryn offered to “second the motion”, but Gail said she had not officially made the motion. Pat made the motion officially “To have a line inserted in the pages of our website where anyone interested could sign up for our emails.” Don Peabody seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Amy made a motion to save the Chat from this meeting. Don seconded the motion. Gail explained that she had set up the meeting to automatically save the chat to our Zoom account. She also said she would send the chat to everyone who attended the meeting.

Gail said that she will hold an open mic on January 30th. Don asked for details. Gail said she will send out an email to the group at large. She said that as we had not had an open mic event in 2024, she wanted the open mic to be started again, on alternate months from the Book Group. She thanked Shawn for maintaining the Book Group.

Caryn asked for any comments or new business.

Gail made a motion to schedule a follow up membership meeting in April to discuss our progress. (There was no second.) There was a brief discussion. Caryn asked if we need a membership meeting to vote on a new slate of people. Then, she said that we should probably set a meeting for that.

Pat asked if it was time to do that or should we wait and put the word out after we’ve had time to decide what we are going to do. Caryn said that some of the current board members don’t want to serve beyond March.

Gail asked Caryn if she had any time in the first or second week of April. Caryn set the meeting for April 5th at 10:00. Gail said she will send out email notices for this meeting as the time comes closer.

Caryn suggested also that the board should meet before then to discuss progress on these goals. She said that by April 5th we should have a slate of nominees and that we would expect to vote for a new board on that date.

Caryn asked if there needed to be a motion indicating that the April 5th meeting be for selecting a board. Pat added, “or to present next steps.” Some small discussion ensued. Pat said, “is that a motion?”

Caryn said, “yeah.” Mel seconded the motion.

Don asked for clarification of the motion. He also asked for a copy of our bylaws. Gail said she would send the bylaws to him and mentioned that there is a link to them near the bottom of the home page on the web site.

Caryn said that the motion on the table was “To adjourn this meeting and to meet again on April 5th at 10:00 to either select a board, or discuss next steps for the League.” Mel seconded the clarified motion. Then the motion carried.

Amy mentioned that we need a spring event according to our current bylaws. She said she would work on it. Pat said she would help with the event.

Gail suggested that if anyone has news of their personal speaking events or publication progress, they could send it to her for the inclusion in the next issue of League Lines.

Hank Parker thanked Caryn for her leadership in the past year. Many added their thanks also.

The meeting officially ended at 12:42.

Gail Wind

Secretary