

Newsletter

It's Time for Consensus

By Bonnie Carter

The topic for the unit meetings in January will be the consensus on the LWVMass Voting Systems study. Last year at our unit meeting we discussed voting systems for single offices, such as governor, mayor, etc. The most prevalent system in the USA is "Plurality-majority." Also called "first past the post," it specifies that the winner is the one with the most votes, even though the percentage of votes might be very low in a race with many candidates. In contrast, a majority voting system requires that the winner receive more than 50% of the votes. We looked at two ways to achieve this: two-round runoff and instant runoff voting (IRV). The two-round runoff is written into the Newton City Charter: The preliminary election narrows the field to two candidates for each slot. Instant run-off voting allows the voter to rank the candidates by first, second, third choice. If the voter's first choice does not get a majority, maybe the second will.

At the recent November units we considered voting systems for legislative bodies. They fall into three broad categories: Plurality-majority, semi-proportional, and proportional. The latter two are used in multi-member districts.

The advantages and disadvantages of the various voting systems are numerous.

The LWV Voting Systems Committee has drafted the following consensus questions. They are not final at the time of this publication. But they give us an idea of what will be discussed at the January units.

Draft of consensus questions:

QUESTION 1 – What criteria should the LWVM support for an energized, democratic election system?

1. Conforms to majority rule
2. Promotes minority representation
3. Not vulnerable to corruption (including gerrymandering)
4. Easy to administer, use, and understand
5. Encourages high voter turn-out
6. Encourages sincere voting
7. Results in geographical representation
8. Encourages candidates to run
9. Encourages better campaigns with real discussion on issues

We will rank these

Very, Somewhat, Not Important and Undesirable

QUESTION 2 – When electing someone to a single executive office, such as mayor, governor, or attorney general, including primary and general elections, should the voting system require the winner to obtain a majority of the votes? For the purposes of this question we are NOT considering multi-member bodies such as town meeting, city council, state legislatures, etc.

At the state level (for example, governor)

Yes No No consensus No response/not asked

If Yes, which voting system should be used?

Instant runoff voting: Acceptable Preferable

Two-round runoff: Acceptable Preferable

Continued on page 4

NOTES FROM OUR TREASURER

Are you looking for an end of year tax deduction? Do you want your contribution to make a difference?

Contribute \$50 (or more) to the League of Women Voters Education Fund. Please send your check to Treasurer, LWV Newton, 8 Stony Brae Road, Newton, MA 02461. The Treasurer will apply the credit to our membership payments to the LWVUS and mail the check to them. Both the

local league and the national league will benefit!

If you have not had a chance to remit your dues payment to LWV Newton, end of the year is a good time to catch up. League dues are not tax deductible, but as a special incentive to our membership, if you send a \$50 check made out to the League of Women Voters Education Fund (and let me know that I should count this as your dues), I

would be happy to do so. Again I will apply this credit to our membership payment to National and mail the check to them.

It is time for us to solidify our membership count for both the state and national leagues. If your membership has lapsed and you have not responded to two reminders, your name will be dropped from our roster as well as the state and national rosters. ■

Questions? Email me at andreaik@comcast.net or call me at 617 964-6490 Andrea Kozinetz Holtz

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LWVNSteeringCommittee@yahoogroups.com

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Newsletter

Editor	Ann Grantham	617-964-0333
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The LWVN Newsletter is published nine times per year. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization open to all citizens of voting age. For more information about the League of Women Voters, call 617-964-0014.

PO Box 610207
Newton, MA 02461
617-964-0014

<http://www.lwvn.ma.lwvnet.org>

Why Do We Do It?

“Why are you so involved with The League of Women Voters? You have to go to so many meetings and it doesn’t even help you get into college!”

This question, not surprisingly, was uttered by my sixteen year old son, a junior at Newton South High school. Before I even had a chance to respond, my son admitted the energy we spent this past fall to encourage college students to register and vote was important; but what about all the other “stuff?” Although I have been intimately involved with only a small portion of the other “stuff,” this has been an active few months for the Newton Leaguers. Many of the women that are involved with the League are also committed volunteers with other organizations. As long as these outside activities don’t conflict with the League’s non-partisan ideals and positions, we can support these issues.

One of our steering committee members, Beth Lowd, was a strong proponent of the ballot question that addressed the issue of creating fair districts. Although Beth worked primarily as a member of Common Cause in this endeavor, Beth obtained backing from the State League of Women Voters who voted to endorse a yes vote on this question. In a short period of time, Beth and her army of volunteers dispensed a great deal of information on the many benefits of creating an independent commission to draw the legislative districts, and removing this power from the state legislators. The question appeared on ballots in only fifteen districts due to the limitations of obtaining enough signatures statewide, and the question was non-binding and advisory, but those voting yes on the question outnumbered those voting no in all 15 districts. To Beth’s credit, the yes vote in Newton was overwhelming, over 75%. Congratulations, Beth, for making an impact!

Another hard-working and successful group is the environmental group ably led by Linda Walden, Martha Richmond, and Deb Crossley. Interested in promoting a more sustainable Newton, members met with Bev Droz of the Green Decade Coalition/Newton to form the High Performance Building Coalition. The coalition targeted the Newton North High School reconstruction as an opportunity to advocate that sustainable or “high performance design,” be used to help guide a more environmentally and fiscally sound building process. Co-chaired by Kevin Duff and Brooke Lipsitt, joined by the Newton Conservators and many individuals, the coalition developed and proposed specific language to include in the city Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to the design team. Although instituting this process normally requires a small increase in cost up front, the coalition showed how long term savings will far outweigh the initial costs. At this writing, the city has released the Project Manager RFQ citing high performance as a goal, the HPB coalition requirements in particular. The draft RFQ to the architect shows similar intent. Congratulations to all who worked on this effort!

As for Voter Service, we’ve been quite busy this fall. In addition to the enormous “new registration” efforts by our own Sharyn Roberts, and the candidates’ forums run by Bonnie Carter, Sharyn, Beth Lowd, Andrea Kelley and me, we have been busy speaking about the importance of voting and emphasizing the voter’s bill of rights.

One of the most engaging educational sessions we led was directed toward fifth graders at the Franklin elementary school. Sharyn and I began the morning talking about democracy with the students. We had agreed to debate the pros and cons of single-sexed classrooms and I created a ballot with the question, “Do you think boys and girls should learn in the same classroom?” They could vote either yes or no. The students diligently prepared statements in an effort to convince their classmates of the merits of their positions. Together, we analyzed the format of the ballot and the clarity of the question. The students first voted to allow their “old” teachers to cast their vote as well. We even discussed the origin of the term “gerrymandering.” Coed education was favored over 2:1 but it was far from unanimous. Four voters admitted they changed their mind after listening to the student speakers, and they agreed there was no need to recount the ballots given the overwhelming number of yes votes. I hope the excitement that filled the classroom that morning stays with these students for at least another eight years, when they will turn eighteen. Because that’s why we do it!

Sue Rosenbaum ■

Report on the Newton Parks and Recreation Commission

Priscilla Leith, LWVN Observer

This report covers the September and October 2004 meetings of the Commission.

Members of the Commission are Chair Peter Johnson (W3); Jennie DeVito (W1); Arthur Magni (W2); Francis Rice (W4); Walter Bernheimer (W5); Vice Chair Andrew Stern (W6); Gwen Fineberg (W7); and Robert Platt (W8). Robert Platt's resignation was announced at the Oct 18 meeting, and his seat is now vacant. Alternate Commission members Peter Kastner, Michael Clarke, and Jack Neville usually attend and substitute when any Commissioner is absent. Michael Clarke did so in September, and Jack Neville in October.

New CPA Proposals for October 2004

Master Plan for Newton's Parks and Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment Project. The Commission is submitting a request for \$60,000 to do a citywide Needs Assessment of playgrounds and parks. This is the next step toward producing a Master Plan for Parks and Playgrounds in Newton. It is a Recreation proposal.

Derek Mannion, Assistant Superintendent for Maintenance and Mark Kelly, Special Needs Director, completed six months' work on a master inventory of parks and playgrounds. It shows 66 locations across the city, detailing the number of fields (soccer, baseball, softball, football, basketball, field hockey), play structures, parking facilities, irrigation systems, benches, picnics tables, water fountains, life courses, etc. by wards.

The Commission and Fran Towle, Department head, want a master plan for Newton Parks and Playfields. Professional landscape architect Marion Pressley has advised them what should be included: supply (inventory of existing space and facilities), demand (public hearings in neighborhoods) and goals (set by the Commission) ... generally, what facilities are available, where they are, who controls/maintains them, and an evaluation of their conditions. Since no one in the Newton Planning Dept

can do this, Department staff and consultants using CPA funding are the best route.

Gath Pool. A Recreation proposal by the Friends of Albemarle, the Playground Project at Albemarle led by Margaret Doris, and the Parks and Rec Dept. is asking for \$120,875 to bring shade, seating on the pool deck, water fountains, and some safety renovations inside the locker rooms at the Gath Pool in Newtonville, Ward 2. Ms. Doris noted that the request comes from the community itself, not from the Rec Department. The demographics of users has changed, with many parents bringing children to Gath for swim lessons and having to wait in the sun, sometimes with infants, as their children take lessons. Also, many older people now come in the daytime for aerobics and swimming. They dislike the exposure to full sunlight. Since this proposal involves structural changes at the Pool, a public hearing was held during the November 15 Commission meeting.

Farlow-Chaffin Park. The Newton Corner Neighborhood Association, under a subcommittee led by Keith Jones, as well as the Newton Parks and Rec Dept. is asking for \$65,500 for Phase 1 (a study) of Farlow and Chaffin Parks and the old Newton Corner Library near Underwood School in Ward 1. It would recreate the original landscape, which had Farlow Pond and a rose garden, and would repair the existing bridge. It is a Historic Preservation project. The Historic Commission has been asked to support it.

Wellington Park and Playground. The Newton Parks and Rec Dept. and Citizens for Wellington Park, a group of West Newton residents, are requesting \$64,000 to continue the restoration of this park that lies on Kilburn Road between Cherry and Waltham Streets in Ward 3. The neighborhood has no recreational facilities except this park. Some work has already been done

under a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to rejuvenate this playground and tot lot. A \$60,000 appropriation from the Capital Improvements Fund is already available and earmarked for a new foundation for the tennis courts (because the wrong kind of foundation was installed initially and the courts keep cracking). The neighborhood, led by Ted Kuklinski, has drawn up plans to add a pathway, some trees, handicapped parking, a water fountain, and some benches and swings, to diversify the usage. This is a Recreation project.

City Hall Landscaping Restoration. In September, the Commission approved a joint proposal with the Newton Historic Commission to restore the 1932 Olmstead landscaping design at Newton City Hall. Phase I request is for \$40,000, to go for the services of a landscape architect beginning in spring 2005. This is a Historic Preservation category project.

Progress Reports on Current CPA Projects

Current CPA projects for irrigation at Bowen Playground, West Newton Common were under way in September. Another \$125,000 has come in for Forte Park in Nonantum which is for the bocce courts, lighting, security, some play equipment and pathways. Millennium Park is well along and completion is expected next spring.

Miscellaneous Business

The Newton Parks and Rec Department has a new green logo using a tree. It can be found on the department letterhead and brochures. Carol Schein, a landscape designer, has joined the Department as Open Space Coordinator. The Forestry Dept received a \$20,000 grant to do some computer programming that will list all city street trees. The income from Gath Pool and Crystal Lake summer season was up, but attendance was down slightly, probably due to the wet summer weather rather than the increase in prices. ■

continued from page one

It's Time for Consensus

At the local level (for example, mayor)

Yes No No consensus No response/not asked

If Yes, which voting system should be used?

Instant runoff voting:

Acceptable Preferable

Two-round runoff:

Acceptable Preferable

Question 3: Note: this question concerns an existing LWVM position. The position may only be amended or dropped by the membership at Convention. This question will serve to get a sense of study participants so that the study committee and state board can decide whether and what to recommend at convention. The position will NOT automatically change as a result of this question.

Should the existing LWVM position on the legislature be changed to allow LWVM support for multi-member districts when there is semi-proportional or proportional representation?

Background

The current position reads:

LWVM supports single-member districts to carry out the one-person, one vote concept (effective 1974)

The League has long held that single-member districts are the best option, and with good reason. When only plurality or majority voting systems are used, single-member districts do the best job of providing diverse representation and ensuring one-person, one-vote. The existing position has allowed the League to be active in ensuring that the state was not split up into some single-member districts and some multi-member districts, all with plurality voting. That situation was clearly unfair and not as representative as it could be.

However, there has not been prior League consideration of whether the same holds when semi-proportional or proportional representation systems are available. Courts have ruled that the multi-member districts used by the semi-proportional and proportional systems do not violate the one-person, one-vote concept because every voter has the same level of voting power. All of the semi-proportional and proportional systems use multi-member districts throughout the area covered.

Letter to The Tab

October 27, 2004



After careful review, the League of Women Voters of Newton continues to support CPA funding for the CAN-DO project at Elliot and Linden Streets. This project preserves an historic home now in terrible disrepair while increasing affordable housing in Newton.

Relative to the lot size, its square footage is at or below the density of the surrounding neighborhood. Care has been taken to preserve the existing neighborhood look of the Linden Street neighborhood by siting the new building sideways, much further from the neighbor's yard than the old garage to be demolished, and further back than is required or usual for the area. Generous landscaping is also provided for.

Subsidies are the only way to achieve housing affordable for low to moderate income families, and this kind of project is one way to preserve Newton's economic diversity in the face of high housing costs. Otherwise a family of four making up to about \$64,000 per year has no chance of moving into our city. Federal HUD grants and CPA funding are not giveaways, but necessary subsidies. Families chosen to receive this housing benefit are subject to strict guidelines limiting resale to maintain affordability.

CAN-DO and the architect have all their approvals in place as a result of four meetings with the Historic District Commission, one before the city Historic Commission, and a hearing before the Community Preservation Committee, all of which were open to the public. In addition, they have held multiple neighborhood meetings. It's time to let this project go forward.

Amelia Koch, for the Steering Committee of the League of Women Voters of Newton

Personal Note

Pat Acton and her husband, Joe Anastasi, recently vacationed in western Massachusetts and visited LWVN long-time members, Bob and Anita Capeless, in their Pittsfield home. Pat reports both of them are doing well and are very happy in their new home, which has a wonderful glass family room looking out at the Audubon Canoe Meadows Bird Refuge with the mountains in the distance. Bob said they can't feed the birds in the back yard since there are bears in the area which shouldn't be attracted to the residential area. Bob and Anita used their skills in obtaining signatures recently when their son, David, ran in a Democratic primary for District Attorney. (He even had an endorsement from Governor Mitt Romney!) On November 2, he was elected to the post of District Attorney of Berkshire County by a three to one margin! Needless to say, he had strong support from his proud parents. Bob and Anita send their best wishes to all their LWVN friends. ■

Because these systems rely on multi-member districts, the existing LWVM position would need to be amended before any League action could take place in which the League supported any proportional or semi-proportional system.

For more information, visit the LWVMass website: www.lwvma.org For more information about proportional representation from an advocate, read Douglas Amy's book: *Beyond the Ballot Box*. Or visit his website: mtholyoke.edu/acad/poit/damy.

*Please join us on
January 12 and
voice your opinion.*



Local Action



October 12, 2004

To: The Newton Community Preservation Committee
Doug Dickson, chair
Re: **ACCESSORY APARTMENT INCENTIVE PROGRAM PROPOSAL**

The League of Women Voters of Newton commends both the Planning Department and Community Living Network for their work in crafting the Accessory Apartment Incentive Program, and we urge the Community Preservation Committee to recommend full funding.

The Newton League has long supported the development of accessory apartments as one way to achieve needed smaller living units while at the same time offering a source of income to assist homeowners in maintaining a large home. This also contributes to retaining the character of our residential neighborhoods. At present the process of creating these units is time consuming, confusing, and expensive. This proposed program would reduce the number of financial and procedural barriers to creating these units.

The program addresses the financial barrier by allocating a pool of funds as grants or loans to homeowners and the procedural barriers by providing staff who would clarify and advertise the rules and offer citizens assistance in negotiating the process. The program would encourage homeowners to develop legal accessory apartments as housing affordable to those earning up to 100% of median. Experimenting with this program may also shed light on where our ordinance is unduly restrictive, and how our process may be simplified.

Another reason for our support relates to the safety of many existing but unauthorized units in the city. Part of the cost barrier to creating these units currently is the requirement for adequate egress and other safety related building regulations. This program may serve to bring some of these existing illegal apartments up to code.

This proposal takes positive steps toward encouraging affordable housing, assisting citizens of Newton who require additional support to maintain their residence, and bringing Newton's housing up to code. We strongly support this initiative.

Respectfully,
Amelia Koch
LWV of Newton Steering Committee

Committees - in - Action

Local Action

Contact Deb Crossley, Chair ⁶¹⁷244-7597

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Environmental Issues

Focus Promoting source reduction, and recycling programs in municipal offices and public schools

Members Deb Crossley
Katherine Gekas
Beth Lowd
Barbara Herson
Robin Maltz
Martha Richmond
Sharyn Roberts

Contact Linda Walden, Chair ⁶¹⁷630-9538

Nominating Committee

Members Barbara Lietzke
Carol Ann Shea

Contact Janet Stearns, Chair ⁶¹⁷559-9987

You may call committee contacts or a Board officer or director to learn more about current committee work. All are welcome to participate.

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

- I would like to join the League of Women voters of Newton. Enclosed is my check for \$50 payable to LWVN.
- Lifetime membership \$1000**
- I would like to receive materials about the League.
- I would like to be contacted by a League member to talk about LWVN.

My Email address may be shared with State and National LWV

**Mail this form (and your check, if joining) to:
Andrea Kozinetz Holtz at 8 Stoney Brae Road,
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*Our politics may lean to the left,
but our work... NEVER!*

Voters Approve Redistricting Ballot Question

Newton voters in the 11th and 12th Middlesex districts approved the non-binding advisory question on redistricting by a 73% YES vote. The question also prevailed in the other thirteen districts where it appeared, by an average of 67%.

Many Newton residents helped in the effort, some members of Common Cause, many from the LWVN, and some with dual memberships. Both organizations are non-partisan on candidates, but supportive of good government issues. Common Cause advocates for "government that is open and accountable." Beth Lowd, who organized the YES on 1 campaign in Newton serves on the boards of both Common Cause Massachusetts and LWVN.

All of the following Newton citizens volunteered to help with the campaign in some way – collecting signatures in June, passing out brochures, displaying lawn signs, or holding signs and passing out palm cards at the polls. Thank you to each of them! Anna Maria Abernathy, Mary Adelstein, Connie Adkins, K. Alexander, Margaret Alt, Alice Aronow, Barbara Balasa, Fred Balfour, Elizabeth Barker, Carol Beard, Jane Berman, Barbara Bix, Al Blankenship, Miriam Blau, Lillian Broderick, Sandy Butzel, Joe Halcyon, Brenda Capello, Bonnie Carter, Cindy Carter, Al and Nancy Cohen, Phyllis Cohen, Jacqueline Colby, Marty Cowden, Marion Cowen, Deb Crossley, Nancy Crowley, Karen Dacey, Victoria Danberg, Sophie Danziger, Carolyn Darack, Peter Dimond, Andrea Downs, Mark Ehrman, Charlotte and Harold Feldman, Irene Gassko, Libby Gerlach, Peter Goldman, Barbara Gore, Ann Grantham, Arthur Green, Natalie Gulbrandsen, Margaret Hannigan, Louise Hauser, Mary Hazzard, Marjorie Hellerstein, Barbara Herson, Anne and Ted Hess-Mahan, Deborah Hirsch, Bruce Holbein, Fiora Houghteling, Ann Howkins, Marianne Hudec, Martina Jackson, Marci Johnson, Steffi Aronson Karp, Andrea Kelley, Patty Kellogg, Kay Khan, Jody Klein, Rita Knapp, Amelia Koch, Andrea Kozinetz, Mary Lanigan, Norman LeBlanc, Beth Lerbinger, Barbara Levy, Barbara Lietzke, Brooke Lipsitt, Jody Lowenstern, Ignacia Mallon, Robin Maltz, Charles and Laurie Mokriski, Linda Morrison, Joyce Moss, Ruth Nussbaum, Judy Obermayer, Susan O'Connell, Catherine Offenber, Patrick O'Reilly, Frances Osten, Mary Margaret Pappas, Mary Remensnyder, Martha Richmond, Sharyn Roberts, Tami Roberts, Sue Rosenbaum, David Salant, Nancy Schon, Fran Seasholes, Amy Seeherman, Sondra Shick, Sumner Shir, Rohna Shoul, Sheila Shulman, Beverly Spencer, Janet Stearns, Susaan Straus, Jeanne Stolbach, Jennifer Stone, Kit Stover, Greer Tan Swiston, John Thomas, John Townsend, Barbara and Jerold Wise, Alice Wolpert.

A coalition of groups, led by Common Cause, and including the LWVN, NAACP, Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights, MassVOTE, and others, will file legislation to amend the state constitution on December first. ■

Beth Lowd

LWVN CALENDAR

December

- 2 Thursday, 7:00 p.m., Working Board/ Potluck Meeting at the home of Ann Grantham, 46 East Side Parkway, 617-964-0333
- 12 Sunday, 5-7 p.m., Annual Holiday Party at the home of Beth Lowd, 38 Hobart Rd. Newton Centre. 617-332-1978
- 14 Tuesday, January Newsletter Deadline
- 15 Thursday, 7:15 p.m., Board Meeting at the home of Pat Acton, 48 Miller Rd., Newton Centre, 617-965-5572.

January

- 6 Thursday, 7:00 p.m., Working Board/ Potluck Meeting at the home of Ann Grantham, 46 East Side Parkway, 617-964-0333
- 12 Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.- 1:30 p.m., Unit Meeting, Voting Systems Consensus, at the home of Fiora Houghteling, 15 Bulloughs Park, Newtonville, 617-969-7764
- 14 Friday, February Newsletter Deadline
- 20 Thursday, 7:15 p.m., Board Meeting at the home of Barbara Lietzke, 68 Highland Ave., Newtonville, 617-332-8630

Legislative Rountable



For current schedule log on to www.newtv.org

ANNOUNCING... LWVN NEW WEB SITE

at www.lwvn.ma.lwvnet.org

Webmaster Judy Jaffe has put this together using the LWV of California's easy web project which enables a local League to create its own Web site and which does not require special software. The domain name is lwvnet.org and the format is consistent with LWVUS guidelines for home page design.

For the past ten years we have been graciously hosted by Bobbi Fox on her newtoncitizens.com. site. Our large volume of pdf materials was taking up a large amount of space on her site. This new arrangement will be beneficial to both sites.

Visit our new Web site and feel free to pass along any ideas and suggestions to our official webmaster! ■

Welcome New Members!

LUCIA SPRINGER DOLAN
20 Devon Rd. Newton Centre, MA 02459
617-332-1893

MARY ROSE GREENOUGH
5 Brae Burn Rd. Auburndale, MA 02466
617-332-1981
mgreenough@rcn.com

STACEY GREENBERG
61 Sveland Rd. Newton Centre, MA 02459
617-332-8997

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