

Newsletter

Volume 12 Issue 2

January 2006

New Support Position for Newton League?

By Priscilla Leith, Study for Concurrence Director

Should the League support a Master Plan that includes all public open spaces, parks and recreational facilities, playgrounds and playfields in the City of Newton, including those under the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Commission, School Department, Conversation Commission and state DPR? Such a citywide plan would list all open spaces, parks and recreational facilities and be a useful guide for future development and acquisitions. It can be an important vehicle for managing decisions about facilities, resources and budget and help set priorities for meeting community needs, especially in times of competing interests.

League monitoring of local government meetings the last few years has highlighted the lack of a single Master Plan for the city's parks, open space, recreation facilities, playgrounds and playfields. (See July/August 2005 Newsletter article "Res Ipsa Loquitur" and earlier articles on Parks and Rec Commission, at <http://www.lwvn.ma.lwvnet.org>.)

Some agencies/departments currently use the City of Newton Recreation and Open Space Plan, 2003-07 as a Master Plan. The Parks and Recreation Department and Commission are now working on drafts of a "Five Year Park Assessment and Development Plan" that evaluates and ranks more than 70 sites based on a number of criteria. While this may be a very useful tool to determine which sites deserve priority for CPA funds, but it as yet has little neighborhood input or any public hearings. Moreover, jurisdiction over our open spaces is fragmented.

The Newton Conservation Commission has jurisdiction over some parks, the School Department over some playgrounds, playfields and the Commonwealth's Department of Conservation and Recreation (aka MDC) over some river-front land. Improvements may be planned or funded for one site without regard to the needs of opportunities presented by adjacent sites.

In general, a Master Plan should look at supply, demand, and goals. Professional landscape designers suggest these steps to generate a Master Plan for the parks, etc.:

- inventory of sites,
- evaluation of sites, their locations & facilities;
- assessment of their condition;
- draft plan by consultants/staff; gathering public input via neighborhood meetings;
- needs assessment;
- final draft, and approval.

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) also has requirements for a master plan. It provides an 11-point outline of those requirements, as well as an Open Space Planner's Notebook for communities writing a plan without a consultant. An EOEA spreadsheet showing the status of open space plans for all 354 municipalities lists Newton as having a plan that expires in August, 2007. Wellesley, Weston and Waltham all have "expired plans" and are not in compliance.

Our 2005 Local League Program has positions that support a Comprehensive Plan and a Capital Improvements Program, improved recreational facilities, improvement of the neighborhood playground-playfield system, and improved cooperation and coordination among appropriate city departments and agencies in planning, effecting and maintaining recreational facilities and their improvement. We have no statement of support for one, single Master Plan for parks, etc.

To further discuss the merits of a master plan, Discussion Meetings with Consensus will be held February 8 and 9 on this topic. (See Calendar on Page 8.) You can still respond via the tear-off (on Page 5), or via our website at www.lwvn.ma.lwvnet.org.

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Sharyn Roberts	617-969-9588
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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.

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

From Members of the Board

ENERGY FORUM

On November 28, 2005, members of a packed Druker Auditorium learned about the Energy Plan for Newton. Developed by the Newton Citizen's Commission on Energy, this plan provides ways that the city, its businesses, institutions and citizens can participate in preserving natural resources, reducing energy consumption and saving money. I wish to thank Brooke K. Lipsitt for her skillful moderating, Mayor David Cohen for sharing what is being done at the present time and Dr. Halina Brown for her excellent presentation of the plan. The evening left us inspired to take the next steps to make sure these excellent goals are achieved.

I thank the Newton Citizen's Commission on Energy, the Green Decade Coalition, the Newton Free Library, and members of the LWVN Environmental Issues committee for co-sponsoring this evening.

Martha Richmond, Environmental Resources Chair

HOLIDAY PARTY

The League Holiday Party, held on December 11, was a very festive and fun occasion – Thanks to all!

Special thanks to Andrea and Bill Kelley for opening their home to Leaguers and friends for the annual LWV holiday party. Thanks also to Allison Stoner for providing the beverages and to Sue Rosenbaum for bringing the paper goods. And thanks to all who brought goodies; it was truly a group effort with many and varied contributions from all. In anticipation of the “champagne and chocolate” fundraiser to be held in March, Sharyn Roberts brought a chocolate fountain and gave it a test run. Thanks, Sharyn!

Bonnie Carter, Steering Committee member

NEW LWVN HANDBOOK

A new handbook is being published following the 2005 Municipal elections, with updated listings for School Committee and Board of Aldermen members. The members who contacted the membership in preparation of this handbook are: Deborah Atwood, Bonnie Carter, Deb Crossley, Ann Grantham, Amelia Koch, Andrea Kozinetz-Holtz, Jane Leighton, Priscilla Leith, Roberta Leviton, Beth Lowd, Sharyn Roberts, Sue Rosenbaum and Allison Stoner. Heartfelt thanks to all.

Robin Maltz, Handbook Specialist

A SPECIAL PLEA

During the recent canvassing of members for our 2006-2007 Handbook, I learned that some members are no longer able to read their Newsletters due to vision limitations. I was wondering if someone might be interested in making a tape which could be shared with these members. Please call me for further information. 617- 969-9588

Sharyn Roberts, Steering Committee member ■

A Proclamation by the League of Women Voters of Newton



In Honor Of
Edward G. English

Retiring City Clerk and Clerk of the Board of Aldermen
January 5, 2006

Whereas, Edward G. English has served faithfully for many years as Newton City Clerk and Clerk of the Board of Aldermen; and

Whereas, Through Oh These Many Years, Edward G. English and the League of Women Voters of Newton have shared a common mission, co- and o-vertly colluding to make information about the City available to the public, and to work both successfully and in partnership with the elected leadership; and

Whereas, While striving to meet their other noble aims, Edward and the League simultaneously spoke their truths in language palatable to and positive for the recipients; and

Whereas, Engaging newly elected officials in the benefits and legalities of “The Open Meeting Law”, revisiting the City Charter and reducing the size of the Board have been joint enterprises; and

Whereas, Edward’s role in creating the first-ever cable television tapings of the Board of Aldermen meetings, and making the “Friday Packets” available to the League, were prescient and indicative of his approach to open communication; and

Whereas, from Ethel Sheehan, Eloise Houghton, Florence Rubin, Audrey Cooper, Anita Capeless, Carol Ann Shea, Sandy Butzel and Andrea Kelley to all other current and future League members, the English commitment and verity shall extend and be remembered; and

Whereas, Edward’s Humor, Wit, Honor, Wordsmithing, Devilish Smile, and generosity with public information are fully recognized,

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the League of Women Voters of Newton, Massachusetts, hereby proclaims that Edward English retire with joy in the satisfaction of tasks well done, and with knowledge of the deep appreciation and gratitude of his League colleagues. ■

Committees - in - Action

Local Action

Contact: Andreae Downs, Chair 617-969-7123

Observers

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Andreae Downs Amelia Koch
Andrea Kelley Priscilla Leith

ELECTION COMMISSION

Nancy Criscitiello

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Martha Richmond

FINANCE COMMITTEE, BOARD OF ALDERMAN

Ruby Ajanee Amelia Koch

NEWTON FREE LIBRARY BOARD

Mary Adelstein

NEWTON PARKS AND RECREATION

Priscilla Leith

Representatives

NEWTON CITIZEN COMMISSION ON ENERGY

Deb Crossley, LWVN Representative

SUSTAINABLE NEWTON COMMITTEE

Sharyn Roberts, LWVN Representative

Committees

CPC LEAGUE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Focus *To follow the process of the granting of Community Preservations funds.*

Members

Anna Maria Abernathy Jody Klein
Barbara Bix Priscilla Leith
Deb Crossley Roberta Leviton
Andrea Kelley Myra Tattenbaum
Amelia Koch

Contact Andreae Downs, Chair 617-969-7123

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

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

Members

Deb Crossley Robin Maltz
Katherine Gekas Sharyn Roberts
Barbara Herson Heather Tausig
Beth Lowd Linda Walden
Contact Martha Richmond 617-244-2076

LWVN MASTER PLAN

CONCURRENCE COMMITTEE

Focus *A study to support a Master Plan for all public open spaces, parks and recreational facilities in the City of Newton.*

Members

Carol Bock Andreae Downs
Sheila Butts Andrea Kelley
Doug Dickson

Contact Priscilla Leith, Chair 617-969-6837

•••

Feel free to call committee contacts or a Board officer or director to learn more.



January 2, 2006

Dear Board of Aldermen,

Welcome to the 2006-07 session! We are writing to let you know about a Community Preservation proposal which we believe is an important way to provide more community housing in our city.

The League of Women Voters of Newton has long supported the concept of accessory apartments. These are units of housing that are created in already existing homes. They provide additional, generally more affordable, units without huge infusions of resources or taking up what is currently open space. They can also provide additional income to Newton homeowners who might otherwise have to leave their homes or the city.

The Community Preservation Committee recently approved a proposal that has been on its agenda for over a year. This application seeks to help homeowners through the complicated maze of local regulation that currently surrounds legalizing accessory apartments and provides up to \$90,000 of loans or grants per applicant.

Compromise language has already been added to this proposal so that it will not result in additional student housing, and will ensure that the proposal facilitates housing that is affordable by conventional standards

We strongly support the resulting proposal, and we urge you to vote for it early in 2006. If you have questions, feel free to contact me at 617-332-0306, and I would be happy to provide you with additional information.

Yours,

Sue Rosenbaum
Spokesperson League of Women Voters Newton
Steering Committee

November 21, 2005

Anne Larner
Chair, Newton School Committee
100 Walnut Street
Newton, MA 02460

Dear Ms. Larner:

We have learned that the School Committee has commissioned a study of all of its buildings in the interest of long-range facilities planning. The League supports this kind of planning and the creation of a set of objective data with which to make decisions.

We would urge the School Committee to include in its study the following:

- An energy audit that includes energy efficiency, indoor air quality, humidity and infiltration and HVAC system performance.
- Operating expense logs for each building.
- A plan for ongoing maintenance.

As the cost of heating, cooling, lighting and maintaining public buildings increases, it is increasingly important to look at how to make our structures more energy-efficient. The life-cycle of materials will come into play, as will such issues as water usage. Knowing the cost of running each building and weighing that in making renovation and replacement decisions may end up reducing overall expenses.

We look forward to the completion of your study and to looking at the resulting data.

Yours,

Sue Rosenbaum
Steering Committee



Fair Districts Recap

Beth Lowd, Fair Districts Director

Many thanks to the dozens of members of the League who worked on the Fair Districts campaign. As I'm sure you learned long before you read this, while Newton's volunteers FAR exceeded their goal, the state did not, so the petition was not filed. Statewide we needed 65,800 certified signatures, but of the 82,000 filed with town clerks only a little more than 60,000 were certified.

Special thanks to members who helped me recruit workers: Amelia Koch, Doris Lelhook, and Roberta Leviton. Also many thanks to Bonnie Carter, AnnaMaria Abernathy, Martha Richmond, Cynthia Krane, and David Outerbridge, whose front porches hosted boxes for collection and distribution of materials. Particular thanks also to the LWVN Board who so strongly supported this enormous project.

Some of you collected a few signatures, several of you collected hundreds, and many collected several pages worth. Because we had 80+ volunteers (some non-League, many Common Cause members), a little from everyone added up to a lot. Thanks so much to ALL of you! The total of raw signatures collected by Newton volunteers was over 6300. Over 4000 of these were Newton signatures. Newton was second only to Boston in the number of signatures certified by its City Election Commission.

We can all be very proud not only of the petitions filled but of the many citizens we educated about the issue of redistricting reform and the merits of an independent redistricting commission. Working for better government is a core League activity, a way of standing up as citizens! The campaign also gave our League positive visibility in the community.

The effort to change the redistricting process will go on. Senate 12, the companion bill to the petition, will be brought up in Constitutional Convention sometime in 2006. It will now need 101 votes to pass (rather than the 51 that would have been needed had the petition succeeded). League members can continue to support the effort by working with Common Cause Massachusetts to secure the needed votes. ■

Proposed Support Position for the LWV of Newton

Support for a Master Plan that includes all public open spaces, parks and recreational facilities, playgrounds and playfields in the City of Newton, including those under the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Commission, School Department, Conservation Commission and state DPR.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with this statement. This method of obtaining a consensus of League members, called concurrence, was used successfully by the LWVUS to create a new foreign policy position several years ago. It enables us to have input from people who cannot attend the Unit Discussion meetings, to be held in February, 2006.

Please complete the tear-off below and return it to Priscilla Leith, 162 Islington Road, Newton 02466 before February 18, 2006. You may also use the LWVN Website at www.lwvn.ma.lwvnet.org.

You must be a member of LWVN to participate.



- Do you concur with the proposed LWVN position on a Master Plan? (Check one answer.)
 - Strongly support
 - Accept
 - Do not accept the proposed position
- What were your means of learning about this issue? (Check all that apply.)
 - Read Newsletter articles
 - Attended February League Discussion Unit meeting
 - Read outside material
 - Other

Name _____

Street _____

Town/Zip _____

Please mail to Priscilla Leith, 162 Islington Road,
Newton 02466 by February 18, 2006. ■

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

My email address may be shared with State and National LWV

- I would like to join the League of Women Voters of Newton. Enclosed is my check for \$55 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.

Mail this form (and your check, if joining) to:
Andrea Kozinetz Holtz at 8 Stoney Brae Road,
Newton Highlands, MA 02461



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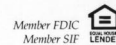
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Following Legislation

Support Revising Mandatory Drug Sentences –S.929

Patricia Muldoon, LWVM Administration of Justice Specialist, Presented the LWVM's position to the State Legislature, 11/22/05

The League of Women Voters supports S.929 on mandatory drug sentences to make the state's correction policies more fair and cost-effective. Senator Cynthia Stone Creem is the bill's lead sponsor.

The state's current sentencing laws impose a mandatory prison term on many nonviolent drug offenders, regardless of the circumstances surrounding their crime. Although those convicted of violent crimes can be eligible for parole after serving two-thirds of their sentences, drug-related offenders must usually serve their full terms with less access to programs and regardless of any steps they have taken while in prison to improve their education and work skills. Mandatory drug sentences are inequitable: 80% of those convicted under mandatory minimum drug sentences are minorities; 34% of individuals convicted of other crimes are minorities.

Mandatory drug sentences have fueled an unnecessary growth in prison population without solving the problem; the state and county prison population has grown fivefold over the last 30 years. The state prison budget nearly doubled in just the last 10 years, at the same time that monies for education and other programs to reduce recidivism have been drastically cut. Legislation is thus urgently needed to provide fairness and alternatives in sentencing.

This bill would allow individuals with mandatory minimum drug sentences to be eligible for parole after serving two-thirds of their sentence in prison, matching the current eligibility standards for those convicted of violent crimes. Alternative sentencing, rather than high-security incarceration – especially for nonviolent offenders – can increase public safety and reduce cost.

Bill Highlights

- This bill will make parole eligibility the same for drug crimes as for violent crimes.
- Currently most drug offenders are released from medium- or high-security prisons directly to the community without parole. Reform of mandatory minimum sentencing laws should provide for a portion of the sentence to be served in the community with parole supervision.
- Drug offenders from minority communities should have the same access to parole as most other offenders.
- Incarceration costs the state \$36,000 to \$50,000 per prisoner each year compared with \$4000 a year to supervise a person on parole. This bill will mitigate the cost of over-incarceration, freeing up funds for other critical needs.

Current Status: In the Joint Committee on Judiciary ■

LWVN CALENDAR

January

- 10 Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. **Local Action Committee meeting**, at the home of Myra Tattenbaum, 210 Upland Ave., Newton Highlands, 617-527-2830.
 - 11 Wednesday, 11:30 A.M.- 1:30 p.m., **Informational Meeting: Traffic and Parking**, at the home of AnnaMaria Abernathy, 45 Islington Rd., Auburndale, 617-244-3447 Brown Bagging Encouraged. Snow Date: January 18th at the home of Fran Seasholes, 163 Cypress St., 617-969-5927.
- 7:15 p.m. **LWVN Board Meeting** at the home of Bonnie Carter, 177 Homer St., Newton Centre, 617-969-0686
Chair – Ann Grantham

February

- 2 Thursday, **Working Board Meeting /Potluck** 6:30 p.m. at the home of Ann Grantham, 46 East Side Parkway, Newtonville 617-964-0333.
- 8 Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. **Discussion Meeting with Consensus**, “Master Plan for Newton’s Parks, Open Space and Recreation Facilities”, at the home of Pat Acton, 48 Miller Rd., Newton Centre, 617-965-5572, Snow Date, February 15 at the home of Linda Morrison, 17 Floral Pl., 617-332-6539. Brown Bagging encouraged.
- 8 Wednesday, 7:15 p.m. **Local Action Committee** at the home of Andreae Downs, 854 Chestnut St., 617-969-7123

- 9 Thursday, 7:30 p.m., **Discussion Meeting with Consensus**, “Master Plan for Newton’s Parks, Open Space and Recreation Facilities”, at the home of Cathy Offenberg, 211 Greenwood St., Newton Centre, 617-244-9590. Snow Date February 16)
- 15 Wednesday, 7:15 p.m. **LWVN Board Meeting** at the home of Andreae Downs, 854 Chestnut St., 617-969-7123
Chair – Sharyn Roberts
- 18 Saturday, 12:00 p.m., **Deadline for Response to Consensus Question** (Read article on Page One.)

March

- 2 Thursday, 6:30 p.m., **Working Board Meeting/Potluck** at the home of Ann Grantham, 46 East Side Parkway, Newtonville 617-964-0333, Chair – Sharyn Roberts
- 8 Wednesday, 11:30 am. - 1:30 p.m., **Informational Meeting: Education**
7:15 **Local Action Meeting**
- 15 Wednesday, **Day on the Hill**, State House
- 26 Sunday, **Champagne and Chocolate** (Snow Date, April 2)
- 30 Thursday, 6:30 p.m., **Working Board Meeting/Potluck** at the home of Ann Grantham, 46 East Side Parkway, Newtonville 617-964-0333. Chair – Amelia Koch

Legislative Roundtable



For current schedule log on to
www.newtv.org

League of Women Voters of Newton

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617-964-0014
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