

Newsletter

Observing Government: A Critical League Role!

How does the LWVN know when an issue is coming up? Whether action is needed? Which committees are working well, and which need guidance? Newton League Observers are our “eyes and ears.” These members attend a meeting of a specific board or committee and record the proceedings to report back to a committee or the Board. As our members are often active participants in a variety of Garden City issues, they are assigned to attend meetings where they can be an impartial viewer.

Every member is welcome to become an observer! Andrea Kelley is coordinating observer training and assignments. You can contact her at rtcdesign@aol.com or 617- 964-4609.

**This issue contains the September Observer reports from four different city boards or committees.
We hope you find them informative!**

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN

*Tuesday, September 5, 2006
Andrea Kelley, LWVN Observer*

On Tuesday, September 5, the Board of Aldermen took the next step in the construction of a new Newton North High School, by voting site plan approval of plan 5a. This means that design development can continue, along with \$1.1m funding. They also voted to pursue the “Manager at Risk” opportunity for hiring an outside construction manager to oversee the project on behalf of the city.

The meeting of the full board began at 7:45 pm Tuesday and adjourned after 1 a.m. Wednesday morning. Following several amendments, friendly and not-so friendly amendments, substitutions, and a motion to postpone the vote, the aldermen did go back to the closest version of the site plan sent to them by the Design Review Committee last spring. At that time, the plan with a “ceremonial entrance” opposite Trowbridge was designated 4a.

From the Design Review Committee, the plan was reviewed by Public Facilities Committee, chaired by Sydra Schnipper, which spent several months examining the proposal, listening to neighborhood input, and ultimately recommending a version called 5b to the full Board for approval. 5b, in deference to a very vocal group of neighbors in opposition to the Trowbridge St. entrance, moved the entry northward to between Clyde and Trowbridge, closer to Elm Road.

Alderman Ted Hess-Mahan proposed an amendment to the Board Order (plan 5b) as the first motion on this project at the September 5 meeting. His amendment was to revert to the Trowbridge location for the entry, now called plan 5a. The motion was based on his understanding from the design team traffic consultants and Newton’s traffic engineer that there is data and professional recommendations supporting that as a safer location than 5b.

As the hours wore on, it did seem difficult for all participants to stay focused, but the many remarks and alternative views provided a very constructive forum to air heated and varying perspectives. Most aldermen felt the need to “move on” with the design in order to get a more specific cost estimate. How the City will fund this project was a concern voiced by many aldermen.

Barring any unforeseen roadblocks, the Gund Partnership design team will continue to work on design development, and the project will go before the Design Review Committee once again during the phases of design development, schematic design, construction documents, details and specifications. It will also go back to the Board of Aldermen for the Public Facilities Committee to review and make further recommendations on aspects under its purview. ■

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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>

News and Views

From our President Sue Rosenbaum

October 1, 2006

I would like to wish everyone a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year. Yesterday, I went to the kick-off breakfast for all Massachusetts League Presidents. I was inspired by the dedication and the energy of the State League leaders (as President Madhu Sridhar says, the full-time staff consists of only 2.5 people, and they accomplish a lot). The passion that the League presidents felt for the League and its mission was evident throughout the room. One of them came from as far away as Williamstown. The kick-off was held at the Newton Marriot this year so I didn't have far to travel. Madhu spoke about the Empowering Voters Act and the successful effort the League has made in getting a voters rights bill passed by the Massachusetts State Legislature this year. *(A copy of the bill can be found below.)*

She was also proud of the first honorary dinner the State League sponsored last week where they honored Paul LaCamera. Former Governor Mike Dukakis was the keynote speaker and lauded Paul LaCamera for his contributions to the democratic process, including the televising of League sponsored debates between contested state races when he was in charge at WCVB. When Dukakis was asked why he was such an ardent supporter of the League, he replied that he "grew up with the League" as his mother was the founder of the Brookline League. A dinner hosted nearly 300 attendees at \$150 per person and they netted over \$80,000. This money will ensure that the State League of Women Voters can sustain such programs as State Convention and the Student Essay Contest, since they lost their main sponsor (the former Fleet Bank).

I would like to build on the enthusiasm that filled the room and hope that we can all work together to "form a more perfect union" and sustain democracy here in Newton.

Sue Rosenbaum,
LWVN, President

Strengthening Voting Rights and Voter Confidence – S.2277

• PROVIDING A VOTERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The legislation requires that the Secretary of the Commonwealth provide a Voters' Bill of Rights at every polling place, on his/her website, and in appropriate publications of the Secretary.

• EXPANDING THE POOL OF ELECTION OFFICERS

The legislation removes the restriction that election officers must live in that city or town and enables cities and towns to hire poll workers who live in another Massachusetts city or town.

Also, the legislation enables people ages 16 and 17 to serve as poll workers, provided they satisfy certain requirements.

• ENSURING THE CONTINUING IMPARTIALITY OF ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS

The legislation prohibits elections officials from serving as campaign chair or co-chair, treasurer, or fundraiser for any campaign other than their own. ■

Observers Needed

One of the key roles that the League of Women Voters provides and offers is that of Observer. Observers watch the public process and decision-making of official bodies, such as the Board of Aldermen, School Committee, and other boards and commissions. Not only is this helpful information for League members, but it also helps keep those boards and commissions accountable for their actions. Just having an official "observer" in the audience can often remind an official to be thoughtful in his or her words and votes.

Being an Observer is a great way to get to know local government without a huge commitment. It doesn't require active knowledge of the topics, yet some experience sometimes helps. It's habit-forming; you may develop an interest in the areas you observe and get to know better. The hours are both flexible and occasionally crazy ("What?" you may ask, "The meeting went on til 11pm?", yet you have the luxury to leave when you want to as you are not a member of the decision-making body).

When I first joined the League, I had a 2 month old baby and 2 year old toddler. I was working, and didn't have much free time, but felt increasingly that I wished I knew more about the community I was living in. Being an Observer was the perfect solution for me: use of my expertise but time-limited and determined by on my own availability.

I got hooked, and have been fascinated by local government ever since. I've learned a lot about child care, housing, zoning, local land use, education, special education, health care, the Community Preservation Act, public landscape maintenance, and parks and recreation as a result of observing local boards and commissions.

If you have a few hours a month and would like to know more about Newton's policy-making bodies, consider observing one of the following groups, or suggest another one that reflects your own interests:

- Board of Aldermen, as a whole or selected committees: Finance, Zoning and Planning, Land Use, Public Facilities, Public Facilities and Transportation, Real Property Re-Use, Programs and Services, Post Audit and Oversight
- School Committee
- Community Preservation Committee
- Parks and Recreation Commission
- The Newton North High School project

As a League Observer, it is crucial to remain an impartial listener and note taker. It's an informative way to learn, but not a good fit for someone with a passionate and outspoken perspective on a hot issue. Speaking on behalf of the League is another matter, and must be based on League positions and board-approved statements. But if you'd like to sit back and watch the process, while keeping a keen eye on who says what, and why, this may be a perfect fit. For more information, call me.

Andrea Kelley, Observer Corp Coordinator 617-527-1467 ■

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- Offices on the ballot for 2006
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- Voters' Bill of Responsibilities
- Videos of Voting Procedures
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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 Stony Brae Road,
Newton Highlands, MA 02461

Committees - in - Action

Local Action

Contact: Jennifer Stoner, Chair
617-283-5687

Observers

Coordinator: Andrea Kelley
617-964-4609

ELECTION COMMISSION	Nancy Criscitiello
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	Martha Richmond Deb Crossley, Chair
NEWTON FREE LIBRARY BOARD	Mary Adelstein
NEWTON PARKS AND RECREATION	Priscilla Leith
NEWTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE	Janet Sterman
NEWTON NORTH DESIGN REVIEW OBSERVERS	Andrea Downs Amelia Koch Janet Sterman Jennifer Stoner

Representatives

NEWTON CITIZEN COMMISSION ON ENERGY
Deb Crossley, LWVN Representative

SUSTAINABLE NEWTON COMMITTEE
Sharyn Roberts, LWVN Representative

Committees

CPC LEAGUE REVIEW COMMITTEE
Contact Jennifer Stoner, Chair 617-283-5687

Focus *To follow the process of the granting of Community Preservation funds by studying proposals and observing meetings.*

Members

Anna Maria Abernathy	Priscilla Leith
Deb Crossley	Robertta Leviton
Andrea Kelley	Jennifer Stoner
Amelia Koch	Myra Tattenbaum
Jody Klein	

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES COMMITTEE
Contact Deb Crossley 617-244-7597

Focus *Promoting resource efficiency and energy conservation in public facilities*

Members

Carol Bock	Martha Richmond
Halina Brown	Sharyn Roberts
Katherine Gekas	Heather Tausig
Barbara Herson	Linda Walden
Beth Lowd	

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

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

September 27, 2006, 7:15 – 9:00 pm
Andreae Downs, LWVN Observer

Present Stephen Fauteux, Doug Dickson, Jeffrey Sacks, Judy Jacobson, Charles McMillan, Walter Bernheimer, Joyce Moss, Judy Jacobson, and staff – Rob Ricchi **Absent:** Ken Kimmel, Claudia Wu

Others in Attendance None

Headlines 07 Plan approved, summaries of past projects, discussion of potential applications, discussion of future of CPA in the state

Agenda Meeting with Stuart Saginor, director, Community Preservation Coalition, Vote on 07 Plan, Project Monitoring, 07 Applications Preview, CCP meeting 9/26 on NewTurf

As I arrived Saginor was talking about the possibility of state legislation to fully fund the CPA match. Funds are dwindling as more municipalities sign on and the real estate market cools, meaning fewer deed fees being paid.

Sagnior noted that the Coalition favors more cities and towns signing on, as that translates into more communities favoring the CPA's continuation. By opening up the legislation, the Coalition fears that legislators might do more mischief, with unfavorable amendments, than good.

A few communities who adopted the CPA are revisiting that vote, as the population favors increasing their levy.

Changes in this legislative session to the law include housing acquisition—that is now explicitly allowed.

A possible amendment the Coalition may propose includes clarifying the Recreation section to allow improving parks that aren't acquired under CPA. Many communities are already doing this, but Newton, for example, is facing a lawsuit if it approves CPA funding for artificial turf on the South High School fields. In Saginor's town of Boxford, they used CPA to create recreational assets where the old ones were not functional. ■

LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

September 27, 2006
Lucia Dolan, LWVN Observer

Present Verne Vance, chair, Vicky Danberg, vice-chair and members Lisle Baker, Ted Hess-Mahan, Amy Sangiolo, Ken Parker. **Absent** Scott Lennon.

Also present: City Clerk David Olson; Comptroller David Wilkinson, Assistant School Superintendent for Business and Finance Sandra Guryan; Chief Administration Officer Sandy Pooler; the new Chief Budget Officer Susan Burstein, Harvard School of Government's Assistant Dean Caroline Wood, and Aldermen Carleton Merrill, Leslie Burg, and Richard Lipof.

Agenda Pooler discussed changes made to Long Range Planning (LRP) document in response to comments from last LRP meeting. The LRP document will be given to the Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) for its use. Part of the BRC's mission is to find solutions to the policy implications from the LRP document.

The major LRP document changes were the addition of a four page executive summary, more supporting documentation for the data behind the numbers, and increases in the estimates for motor vehicle tax, licenses and permits and investment income.

Continued from page 4

LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Vance asked if there were any disagreements between the Comptroller and Chief Administrative Officer on assumptions in the LRP report. Both replied no.

The LRP forecasts hold 99% of real revenue in predictions and 1% in reserve for Free Cash. This is a policy decision.

Danberg questioned the \$100,000 a year from Boston College, with no increase over time. Pooler replied Boston College gives 3% more than what is stated. The additional monies go directly to Jackson Homestead and other projects.

Danberg noted parking meter receipts decreased. Wilkinson replied parking receipts are up, but only the amount used to support the operating budget is listed. A bucket truck or similar may have been bought out of the other parking meter receipts.

A low School Building Assistance (SBA) estimate for '07 was given. The City is planning on receiving more from SBA and putting it in Capital Improvement savings.

Parker questioned why city salaries were flat from '07 to '12 while school salaries were increasing. Parker said mathematically turnover with highly paid employees leaving and lower waged new employees starting both city and schools salaries should be flat. Guryan replied yes in theory, but her data didn't support the theory. Step increase rates and collective bargaining differs between city and school.

Baker requested that Pooler's oral explanation of the varying options for State Aid income (House and Senate have different legislation with different amounts in local aid) and the exclusion of salary increases for union employees (for negotiating reasons) be added to the LRP document.

Hess-Mahan asked if the LRP should be revised/reviewed more than once a year. Pooler felt it was unnecessary. Most changes would be minor and big changes would be obvious (as in State Aid).

Danberg asked how the LRP would be affected by the decreasing valuation of houses. Pooler replied housing prices would have to drop 40% to affect the city's ability to levy.

Dean Wood was introduced. Her students are to assist the BRC in their work in creating a strategic plan based on the LRP forecasts.

Parker asked "Do we have a game plan for the upcoming \$2.7 to \$5.5 million deficit?" Pooler replied "I would be remiss if I said we did."

Danberg asked if capital outlay is at 5%. Pooler replied a little less than 3%.

The LRP report's bonding interest rate assumption is 5%.

The Aldermen survey regarding the size of the board is ongoing. Vance will summarize the Aldermen's replies next LRP meeting. Parker is getting the citizen's half of the survey up on the web. ■

NEWTON PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING

September 18, 2006

Priscilla Leith, LWVN Observer

Members Present Frank Rice (W4), Chair; Jennie DeVito (W1); Arthur Magni (W2); Peter Johnson (W3) Myra Tattenbaum (W8); Alternate Jack Nevile. *Absent:* Walter Bernheimer (W5); Alternates Michael Clarke and Peter Kastner. *Vacancies:* Ward 6 and Ward 7.

Staff Present Fran Towle, Department Head, Bob DeRubeis; Stephanie Pokaski; Carol Stapleton; and Fay Hays, Secretary.

THREE NEW PROPOSALS TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE CPA IN OCTOBER, 2006

Newton Centre Playground, Phase I. Carol Shein is project manager and Walker-Klusing Design Group is the architect. This is a "historic preservation" proposal for about \$2M for infrastructure in the playground. It includes asphalt paving of the maintenance road from Centre St. into park, and asphalt paving of handicapped-accessible pathways from handicapped parking areas on Bowen and Homer Streets.

A number of neighbors were present and spoke to this proposal, including Andy Stern, former CPA Commissioner and Parks and Rec Commissioner. Stern read from Newton CPC's comments on the NC Playground Plan when the study phase was approved as "historic preservation". He urged changes in materials for the pathways to comply - e.g., use granite vs. asphalt. Questions were raised about the width of the pathways, whether the architects had been asked about options for the materials. Towle responded that asphalt is necessary for handicapped access. Stern requested an "elevation plan" and more details, which were not available due to the project manager's absence.

The Commission approved the proposal, 6-0, but agreed to ask the architect what other surfaces could be used.

City Hall Landscaping, Phase I. Coming in as "historic preservation" at approximately \$1M, with \$305,655 from CPA and remainder from CDGB. This phase is for the area between City Hall Drive and Walnut Street in front of City Hall and includes dredging lagoons by DPW. Carol Shein is project manager, and Pressley Associates are the architects. *Passed, 6-0.*

Farlow-Chafin Park, Phase I. Stephanie Pokaski is project manager, Brown, Richardson & Rowe, architects. Coming as "historic preservation" for unknown amount. Still no firm decision on whether lagoons will be in the final plan. Cost of using MDC water is exorbitant, so this phase includes cost to test for well water. Also includes design for a bridge between the ponds which won't be built if well water is unavailable. *Approved, 6-0.*

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NEWTON PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING

CPA Projects Update

Forte Park is finished and dedicated. Bowen School Irrigation and Bowen soccer & Baseball fields are done. Albemarle Corridor Requests for Proposals for a designer will go out soon. Williams School came back to Parks and Recreation to manage.

Stearns & Pellegrini Park are in litigation. Wellington Park's basketball and tennis courts were completed; dedication was scheduled for October 1; rest will be finished in Spring '07. Gath Pool new floor is in, benches have arrived, bid to go out soon for the shade awning. Washington Park lighting project is back out for re-bidding, because it went over cost. Newton Upper Falls & Newton Highlands Playgrounds Requests For Proposals are out, and a designer will be chosen shortly; hope to do work in Spring '07.

Crystal Lake

There was a sewage backup in the bathhouse in August. Building Commissioner Nick Parnell, staff from Parks and Rec, Engineering, and DPW are all working on the poor physical condition of the bathhouse and serious storm runoff problems on the entire site. As of the September 28 Conservation Commission meeting, the new City Environmental Engineer, Maria Pologruto, had found there are bad roof leaders, clogged gutters, and erosion of the bathhouse foundation. Flooding and erosion are caused by water running from the parking lot and other parts of the site down to the bathhouse level. She proposes installing some catch basins, a trench drain, some eco-stone, some swales, removing asphalt paving next to the bathhouse, and putting in some landscaping to help absorb storm runoff water. She will give the Conservation Commission a more specific plan early next year. ■

COMING UP: AFFORDABLE HOUSING STUDY

The 2005 LWVM Convention adopted a study of affordable housing in Massachusetts to evaluate the effectiveness of existing legislation and programs in meeting the need for affordable housing in our state.

The LWVM Affordable Housing Study Committee, under the leadership of Wendy Manz and Jane Nash is putting together a review of statutes, regulations, and programs. A major focus of the study will be bringing our members up-to-date on existing approaches to affordable housing. As we begin to draft consensus questions for the local Leagues, we are mindful of established positions of the LWVUS on affordable housing. Both the Meeting Basic Human Needs and Equal Rights positions address housing issues, and we will evaluate the effectiveness of Massachusetts programs in light of those positions. You can read the Meeting Basic Human Needs and Equal Rights positions by going to the LWVUS website, www.lwv.org, clicking on "Issues," then clicking on "Social Policy."

The scope of the study will include a review of the evolution of Massachusetts housing legislation, with a focus on M.G.L. Chapters 40B, 40R and 40S, and funding under the Community Preservation Act, which provides statewide incentives for the production of affordable housing. We will also look at municipal bylaws and the function of local housing authorities and housing partnerships, community housing organizations, and senior housing programs.

If you are interested in participating in this study, contact LWVN Board Member Roberta Leviton. ■

LWVM TAKES NO POSITION ON 2006 STATEWIDE BALLOT QUESTIONS

The LWVM Board has voted not to take a position on any of the statewide ballot questions being presented to voters this November.

Question #1 would permit sale of wine by food stores. The LWVM Board determined that we do not have a relevant position on this question.

Question #2 would allow candidates to be nominated by more than one party and to have their name listed on the ballot multiple times if they had multiple nominations. LWVM does not have a relevant position on this issue.

Question #3 would allow child-care workers in the state's

subsidized program to bargain collectively. While it certainly might be possible to support the intent of this initiative under our day care position, LWVM has a tradition of supporting the legislative process over the petition process as the best way to make law. The LWVM Board was not convinced in this case that the legislative process had yet been adequately tried, and therefore decided not to take a position on this initiative. ■

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LWVN CALENDAR

October

- 5 Thursday, 6:30 p.m., **Working Board Potluck/Meeting**, at the home of Ann Grantham, 46 East Side Pkwy, 617-964-0333
- 11 Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., **Monthly Topic Meeting** Newton North High School, First Baptist Church, Centre and Beacon, Newton Centre. Brown Bagging Encouraged! Andrea Kelley, 617-964-4609.
- 12 Thursday, 7:30 p.m., **Local Action Committee Meeting**, at the home of Priscilla Leith, 162 Islington Rd., Auburndale, 617-969-6837.
- 15 Sunday, 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., **Harvest Fair**, Newton Centre Green. Volunteers Needed. Contact Carol Bock or Sharyn Roberts.
- 19 Thursday, 7:15- 9:30 p.m., **LWVN Board Meeting**, at the home of Sue Rosenbaum, 121 Winslow Rd., 617-332-0306.

November

- 2 Thursday, 6:30 p.m., **Working Board Potluck/Meeting**, at the home of Ann Grantham, 46 East Side Pkwy, 617-964-0333
- 7 Tuesday, Polls Open 7:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m., **State Election Day**
- 15 Wednesday, 11:30 am.- 1:30 p.m., **Monthly Topic Meeting Update** on CPA Projects at the home of Myra Tattenbaum, 210 Upland Ave. off Dedham St., 617-527-2839 Brown Bagging Encouraged! Andreae Downs 617-969-7123.
- 16 Thursday, 7:15 p.m. - 9:30 p.m., **LWVN Board Meeting**, at the home of Allison Stoner, 31 Colgate Rd., Newton Lower Falls, 617-527-4018.
- 28 Tuesday, **Forum on NNHS**, Terry Yoffie, 617 965 1796.

Legislative Roundtable



For current schedule log on to www.nwtv.org

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