

Newsletter

LOCAL PLANNING MEETING ON APRIL 12

What issues do you think are most important to us and the community?

ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME AND ENCOURAGED TO CONTRIBUTE –
THOSE WHO ATTEND THIS PLANNING MEETING MAY IMPACT
LEAGUE EFFORTS FOR THE COMING YEAR!

Committees and specialists will summarize and assess the work they have accomplished this past year, and suggest what efforts should be undertaken moving forward. Members who wish to propose a new study for next year should bring the proposal to this meeting, at the home of Fran Seasholes at 7:30 pm.

Once reports are given and proposals made, we will discuss priorities against resources (people more than money!) and recommend priorities to the LWVN board. The LWVN board

- Close monitoring of the CPA?
- Further implementation of the energy action plan?
- Newton fiscal policies and strategies?
- Newton city government?
- City Comprehensive plan/managing future development?
- Sidewalk snow shoveling ordinance?
- Monitoring the Election Commission?
- Affordable housing strategies?

hears the consensus drawn from this meeting and recommends program and action priorities and/or new studies to annual meeting.

If you are unable to attend, but have thoughts or information you would like to share, please contact Jennifer Stoner or Deb Crossley a few days in advance so that we can bring your input to the group.

“It is not enough to ask what your League can do for you; Ask what you can do for your League.”

Deb Crossley ■

WINE AND CHEESE FUNDRAISING EVENT



Vicki Donlan, the publisher of Women's Business Boston, will speak with us at our Wine and Cheese Fundraising Event. Her topic will be *Why It's Time for Women to Lead in America*.

Ms. Dolan was the first executive director of The Commonwealth Institute, a nonprofit organization founded by twelve prominent Boston women CEOs to assist women entrepreneurs in the growth of their businesses. She has been instrumental in the growth of networking for business women as the co-founder and first executive director of The South

Her Turn!

Shore Women's Business Network and as founder of The Alliance of Women's Business and Professional Organizations. She is the recipient of many honors. In 2004 the Big Sister Association of Greater Boston honored her with their Achievement Award. Bryant University recognized her in 2005 as New England Businesswoman of the Year.

Having spent more than twelve years of her early business career in the newspaper business, Ms. Donlan is fulfilling a dream in publishing a newspaper that is designed to give “ego to women and change the face of the business news.” ■

Join Ms. Donlan and League members and friends at the home of Laurie and Paul Gershkowitz

Sunday, April 29, 2007 5-7 p.m. See calendar for details

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NEWSLETTER

Editor Ann Grantham 617-964-0333

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>

What does Newton want to be when it grows up?

On March 14th, the League of Women Voters held its monthly topic meeting for our members. We were fortunate to have four members of the Blue Ribbon Commission come and speak to us. George Foord, Ruthanne Fuller, Jane O'Hern, and Sarah Ecker represented four different sub-committees of the commission and each spoke about the focus of their committee.

The purpose of forming the Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) was to assemble a group of financial experts that could examine the state of the financial health of the city and then provide advice to the Mayor and the aldermen on planning for the city's future.

Historically, the city has created a one-year balanced budget, but this past year the city also formulated a 5-year plan, aiming to forecast its revenue and expenses for the next five years. The BRC was asked to make its own predictions. Without going into any of the complicated details, the conclusions drawn by the BRC did not match the forecast predicted by the Mayor. The BRC reported that there would be a much larger deficit than the Mayor had forecast if Newton wants to maintain the status quo as a diverse city with a great many high quality services and public schools.

Sara Ecker was part of the subcommittee that focused on the amount of debt that the city of Newton carries. Her group was surprised to find that, even among the thirteen municipalities with a AAA rating, Newton, by far, carried the lowest amount of debt per capita. When asking what the right amount of debt service is appropriate, the group concluded that the city should first determine what its actual needs are and compare this to the amount of revenue they anticipate. In other words, the city of Newton has to decide what it wants to be when it grows up. Only then, can it decide how much money it needs to borrow to attain these goals.

George Foord talked about ways the city can save money including having the state control its pension funds. This sub-committee looked at ways that the city could close the gap between spending and revenue. Ruthanne Fuller and Jane O'Hern talked about the need to spend sufficient money on building maintenance and create responsible development in the city.

The League of Women Voters of Newton wants to thank the volunteers of the BRC for donating their time and expertise to our city. The League hopes to hold future discussions regarding the city budget and planning for the future. Together we need to decide what we want Newton to look like in the future and plan for that future. I look forward to participating in these critical discussions.

Sue Rosenbaum
LWVN, President ■

NOT YOUR MOTHER'S STUDY GROUP!

Technology Streamlines Affordable Housing Study

Even if you are unable to attend a single meeting, you can become informed on a topic you haven't even thought of thoroughly understanding and voice your opinion concerning Massachusetts Affordable Housing this September.

Why a study?

In order for the League to have a position on an issue, members must agree in broad terms on what they think about various issues of a policy issue. They do this through study. It's study that makes action possible. It brings to members the knowledge that makes League action uniquely credible.

During the study phase, members have an opportunity to examine the facts and key pro and con points. They are encouraged to discuss the political realities of action and to contribute ideas for the board to consider when it formulates an action strategy after a position is reached.

What are we studying?

Studies are done at the local, state and national levels. At the 2005 LWVMA convention delegates voted to pursue two state studies, Fiscal Policy and Affordable Housing.

The design of the Massachusetts League's study of affordable housing is to learn about major Massachusetts legislation that encourages and enables communities to provide affordable housing for residents.

The LWVM Affordable Housing Study Committee has a wealth of research to share. Newton League members can view them on the state web site as well the Massachusetts Voter. Log on to www.LWVMA.org and you'll see Member Resources in the left hand column. Click on Member Resources and select LWVM Studies.

At this time four articles have been posted with two more to come before the consensus in the fall. All articles are referenced for further study.

Article 1: "Why Affordable Housing?"

Article 2: "Where It All Began: Some Historical Perspective"

Article 3: "Massachusetts Legislation To Develop Affordable Housing – Chapter 40B" Jane Nash, LWVM Affordable Housing Study Committee co-chair

Article 4: Financial Incentives to Build Affordable Housing – Chapters 40R and 40S Muriel Zaginailoff, LWVM Affordable Housing Study Committee member

What is Consensus?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines consensus as: collective opinion or concord; general agreement or accord.

Consensus/group discussion is the technique most often used in the League for reaching agreement. It is a process whereby members participate in a group discussion of an issue. The consensus reached by members through group discussion is not a simple majority, nor is it unanimity; rather it is the overall sense of the group as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions, whether in a membership meeting or a series of topic meetings at the local level, or regional meetings for the state. Come September, we'll learn what form the LWVMA consensus will take.

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN IN AND LEARN ABOUT THIS IMPORTANT TOPIC.

The Newton League's housing specialist is Roberta Leviton, 617-965-0016.

For printed copies of the articles contact Ann Grantham, 617-964-0333. ■

Welcome New Members!

JANE BAIER

88 Forest St. Newton Highlands 02160 617-969-4513

NANCY GRISSOM

7 Orris St, Newton 02466 617 969-0006
ngrissom@comcast.net

JUDY JACOBSON

289 Cypress Street Newton 02459 617 964-8952
judyjacobson@rcn.com

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF

Blue Ribbon Commission Report

Background from the Board of Aldermen Special Meeting to hear from the Blue Ribbon Commission

February 17, 2007

Lucia Dolan, Observing

Aldermen Present: *Lisle Baker, Carleton Merrill, Scott Lennon, Stephen Linsky, Marcia Johnson, Susan Albright, Anthony Salvucci, Ted Hess-Mahan, Leslie Burg, Jay Harney, Leonard Gentile, Amy Mah Sangiolo, Christine Samuelson, Brian Yates, Paul Coletti, George Mansfield, Ken Parker, Victoria Danberg, Sydra Schnipper, Verne Vance, Cheryl Lappin, Mitchell Fischman*

Aldermen Absent: *Ben Weisbuch, Richard Lipof*

Blue Ribbon Commission Present:

Paul Levy, Amelia Koch, George Foord, Malcolm Salter, Sarah Ecker, Ruthanne Fuller, Jane O'Hern, Tony Logalbo

School Committee Members Present:

Gail Glick, Reenie Murphy, Ann Larner, Dori Zaleznik

City Staff: *Sandy Pooler, David Wilkinson, Sandra Guryan, David Olson*

Other: *Connie Paige, Boston Globe West; Rachel Lebeaux, Newton TAB; Rob Gifford; Anatol Zuckerman; 2 other regular citizen observers*

Paul Levy gave a summary of BRC report's finding of an expanding structural deficit.

BUDGET FORECAST SUBCOMMITTEE: Malcom Salter explained the difference between city and BRC forecasts: Salaries and Wages 80% (BRC assumed 2½% annual increases); Supplemental Capital Improvements 15% (annual CIP expenses equal to 3% of total capital replacement value); Increased School Enrollment 5%. By 2012 they estimated a 10% revenue deficit. Salter concluded with personal comments: "I think we have to move, but not necessarily today. It will take months to cautiously think about it "so as not to make bad, irreversible decisions."

Choices to overcome the deficit? A series of incremental fixes or long term comprehensive and systematic changes requiring prioritizing.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT SUBCOMMITTEE: Jane O'Hern commented that Newton's 3% CIP policy was not needs-based. Per capita our CIP spending is very low compared with other AAA communities. Suggested general and debt exclusion overrides. Even conservative BRC members agreed more money needs to go to CIP.

CLOSING THE GAP SUBCOMMITTEE: George Foord: "Our options are not very bright." Most significant changes require legislative action, which could take years to enact: 1) allowing cities to join the State health plan; 2) allowing health benefits

to be taken out of collective bargaining. Smaller savings possible from 1) increased recycling, estimated \$200K; PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) difficult to encourage; energy efficiency improvements (city currently in process of undertaking); improved pension fund management.

Coletti: What was included in new growth projections?

Answer: Historical average plus \$2 million a year starting in 2001 for Chestnut Hill development. Other up-coming developments not included. Coletti "we've under-estimated new growth."

Danberg: What are advantages/disadvantages of increasing debt service? In theory maintenance costs would go down. Improved quality of life.

Levy: Lack of maintenance imposes a hidden tax - higher repair and maintenance costs.

Coletti initiated a general discussion on starting a Newton endowment fund (community foundation), similar to college's, hospital's and Brookline's. Danberg and others have already begun talking with Brookline endowment people. General agreement that people need to be asked to give and are more willing to give if they know where the money is going. Some concern that an endowment fund may be difficult to maintain long-term.

Pooler commented that the BRC report validates the existence of structural deficit. Any change requires political process where the public gets informed.

Baker: How should we do strategic planning so that citizens can understand the choices?

School Committee members mentioned that the School Dept. has begun a strategic plan.

Levy commented that the budgeting process is very opaque. Recent NNHS debate made it more difficult for citizens to see the need for more taxes, because it came across as getting something for nothing. Because the city must balance its budget and does so every year, it becomes an invisible problem and citizens start to ignore early cries of shortfalls. "Trust the people to do the right thing once they have the information."

Mansfield said: 1) budget process needs a broader focus, 2) need analysis of capital facilities. Said Public Facilities Committee feared such analysis would create such a large set of expectations, we'd never be able to fill them.

Schnipper questioned the political will to raise taxes. Solid Waste Committee found not even the will to impose a collection fee for disposing of old stoves and refrigerators.

Salvucci: 20-25% of the population have kids in school, how

Local Action



March 15, 2007

Alderman Paul Coletti
 Chairman, Finance Committee
 1000 Commonwealth Avenue
 Newton Centre, MA 02459

cc: The Honorable Mayor David Cohen
 Newton Board of Aldermen,
 Lisle Baker, President
 Design Review Committee
 Arthur Cohen, Chairman

Dear Alderman Coletti:

The League of Women Voters of Newton appreciates your thoughtful letter of February 22 to Mayor David Cohen urging that Newton maintain high quality standards throughout design and construction of the new Newton North High School.

The League supports a sustainable design that promotes choosing building materials and systems according to long term, or life cycle cost analyses, not merely first cost estimates.

The League advocates for adequate funding for municipal functions, and supports careful management and conservation of city resources. To this end, new facilities must be built to last and to very high standards of construction, so as to minimize energy and resource consumption and avoid excessive operation and maintenance costs over the life of the building. Although it may cost more initially to invest in a better quality building, our community will be well served by reduced replacement, operation and maintenance costs over time.

We applaud your attention to the quality and long term maintenance cost implications of the materials used in this project at this critical juncture.

Thank you for raising the issue.

Sincerely,

Sue Rosenbaum
 President, LWV Newton

Day On The Hill

**THE FACE OF POVERTY
 IN MASSACHUSETTS:
 THE POOREST AMONG US**

**Tuesday, April 10, 2007
 State House, Boston**

9:00 a.m. Registration &
 Reception –
 Nurses' Hall

Join us for a light breakfast – and the chance to talk with local Legislators, League members from across the state, and with our program Specialists.

10:00 a.m. – *Program*
 12:30 p.m. Gardner Auditorium

Keynote Speaker
 Governor Deval Patrick

Featured Speakers
 Noah Berger, *Executive Director, MA Budget and Policy Center*

Lyndia Downie,
President, Pine Street Inn

Sylvia Ferrell-Jones,
CEO, YWCA Boston

And

*News from League
 Program Specialists*

For more information or carpooling contact Lucia at 617-332-1893 or luciadolan@rcn.com ■

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

- 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.

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 Stony Brae Road,
 Newton Highlands, MA 02461**

Committees - in - Action

Observers

Coordinator: Andrea Kelley
617-964-4609

ELECTION COMMISSION Nancy Criscitiello
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES Deb Crossley
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

LOCAL ACTION

Contact Jennifer Stoner, Chair 617-283-5687
Focus *Community Preservation Act*

Members

Anna Maria Abernathy
Deb Crossley Amelia Koch
Lucia Dolan Priscilla Leith
George Foord Roberta Leviton
Andrea Kelley Myra Tattenbaum

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Contact Deb Crossley 617-244-7597

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

Members

Carol Bock Barbara Herson
Halina Brown Beth Lowd
Lucia Dolan Sharyn Roberts
Katherine Gekas Jennifer Stoner

•••

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

A Solid Comprehensive Plan

Newton volunteers have worked out a solid Comprehensive Plan describing not just what is predicted to happen to the city, but what residents have agreed they want.

But a lack of funding for Planning staff has meant that little if any action can take place, according to Phil Herr, a retired planner who sat on the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee. Herr came to talk with the League on Wednesday, Feb. 28, after the topic meeting was snowed out on February 14.

A comprehensive plan, Herr explained, looks at all the components that might be planned—traffic, streets, building location and special squares. Washington DC, he said, is an example of a plan that looked beyond merely where the streets go, or where the buildings, and brought things together to make special vistas and spaces.

Newton, of course, is already built up, so the planners had less of a blank slate to work with. However, they did put different items together to see how they might interact with one another. Among the areas of focus were economic development, transportation and history.

The Advisory Committee soon realized that the city could grow its commercial space and that it would come out ahead in terms of taxes and spending on services if it did. But where it would be possible and whether residents would want it built out are the question. For the most part, the plan recommends adding commercial space in areas, like Needham Street and village centers, which are primarily commercial.

The city intends to build on the current plan by filling in the neighborhood details. The first neighborhood to take up the challenge is Newton Centre, which is why we have been seeing articles and meetings about possibilities for the parking triangle in its center, Herr said. Further neighborhood planning, however, is stalled by the aforementioned lack of planning department staff.

The League asked Herr to look at two other areas that are promising to develop: Chestnut Hill Square (the Route 9 site of the former Omni supermarket) and Needham Street. Herr noted that our population was declining, and so would the amount of retailing that the area could support. However, Chestnut Hill Square will not affect Newton Centre, as the two areas offer different kinds of shops.

Along Needham Street, Herr noted that the Advisory Committee found plenty of room there for additional commercial growth. Adding housing, he noted, would not benefit the city much, and would cost more and take more space than commercial, the way the street is now zoned. In addition, the committee had explored the idea of using the right-of-way behind the Needham Street Corridor for light rail again, and had approached the MBTA. Needham, however, is not interested in this proposed extension of the D Green line.

The plan has been reviewed by some subcommittees of the Board of Aldermen, Herr said. It needs to be accepted by the Planning board and the full board of Aldermen. But even once approved, a slow process, it won't be binding. ■

Continued from page four

Blue Ribbon Commission Report

do I sell an override to the other 80%? "You wouldn't believe the calls I received" about the \$25 drainage fee. My ward has 1 wealthy and 3 blue collar precincts. "If I went into the coffee shop and said I support an override they'd drag me behind a car." Getting nervous about the funding for NNHS, which I support 110%, "where's the dough coming from?"

Baker has asked Vance and the Long Range Planning Committee to look at how to begin a discussion on issues Alderman Salvucci raised.

Yates: On one hand we love affordable housing, on the other hand we crunch affordable housing. He'd be happy to raise taxes on Levy, it's all the ones underneath.

Johnson: We have a window of opportunity with the BRC report and NNHS vote - we have people's attention. "Now's the time."

Levy: You are currently imposing an implicit tax that is "as unfair as any." ■

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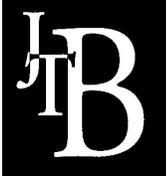
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LWVN CALENDAR

April

- 10 Tuesday, 9:30-12:30 a.m. **Day on the Hill**,
For more information or carpooling contact
Lucia, 617 332-1893 or luciadolan@rcn.com
- 12 Thursday, 7:30 p.m. - **Local Program
Planning**, at the home of Fran Seasholes,
163 Cypress St., Newton Centre.
Contact Deb Crossley, 617-244-7597
- 24 Tuesday, 9:00 a.m. **Local Action Committee**
- 26 Thursday, 7:15 p.m. **LWVN Board Meeting**
add at the home of Ann Grantham,
46 Eastside Parkway. 617-964-0333
- 29 Sunday, April 29, 5-7 p.m. - **Wine & Cheese
Fundraising Event**, 50 Green Park, Newton.
LeagueWineNCheese@lwn.ma.lwvnet.org
or Andrea Kozinetz at 617-964-6490 for
reservation and information on tax-deductible
contributions.

May

- 24 Thursday, 6-9 p.m. - **Annual Meeting**,
Newton Senior Center, Newtonville.
Contact Robin Maltz 617-969-1554.

June

- 1-2 Friday and Saturday, LWVMA Convention



Think Green... Save Trees!

Join our LWVNSaveTrees listserv and you will receive an electronic message to view the Newsletter. Send a blank e-mail to:

LWVNSaveTrees-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and save trees! ■

If you would like to receive an

AUDIO VERSION OF THE NEWSLETTER

Contact Sue Rosenbaum at dsr2@rcn.com or 617-332-0306.

Rent a Chocolate Fountain!

Enhance your entertaining (and support the League).
Call Sharyn Roberts at 617-969-9588 and rent one from the League.

Suggested donation is \$25.

Legislative Roundtable



For current schedule log on
to www.nwtv.org

League of Women Voters of Newton

PO Box 610207
Newton, MA 02461
617-964-0014
www.lwvn.ma.lwvnet.org

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