

Newsletter

Charter Reform is “Blowin’ in the Wind”

IS IT TIME FOR CHANGE ... AGAIN?

By Sue Flicop

The original city charter was created in 1897, with minor changes made over the next 80 years. In the 1960s a new constitutional amendment was passed in Massachusetts that created rules for charter reform. In 1966, a six-month Board of Aldermen study recommended few if any changes to the city charter. The 1966 League study recommended the creation of the city charter committee in 1969.

The League recommended creation of a Charter Commission, and the following:

- Reduction in the number of Alderman from 24 to 16
- Retention of residency requirement for School Committee membership
- Special elections to fill vacancies instead of election by the Board of Aldermen
- Four-year term for Mayor
- Four-year staggered term for School Committee positions
- Mayoral appointment of department heads with the Board of Aldermen approval
- Mayoral removal of department heads without the Board of Aldermen approval

The Charter Commission was created (by the voters) in 1969. It was headed by Florence Rubin, who had played a major role in the LWVN study. The Commission’s report (the new charter) was overwhelmingly approved by the voters approved by the voters.

Some of the more significant changes included:

- Staff for the Board of Aldermen (i.e. clerk)
- Four-year term for Mayor, which also became a full-time position
- Special elections to fill vacancies instead of election by Board of Aldermen
- Some control over school maintenance budget by the School Committee
- Preliminary elections
- Creation of a citizen’s assistance officer
- Creation of a 5-year capital improvement plan
- Creation of a process for initiatives and referendums
- Establishment of local neighborhood councils
- Requirement for open records of the Board of Aldermen meetings and documents
- Recodification of ordinances every 5 years

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Legislative Round Table Wins RED CARPET AWARD at NewTV Gala



The Legislative Round Table has won NewTV’s Best Studio Production Award, Red Channel, 2006. Congratulations to producer Ruby Ajanee, director Tony Mastantuono, and host Holly Gunner for creating the award winning *Health Care Access* episode. Thanks also goes to our legislators, Senator Cynthia Creem, Representative Kay Khan, and Representative Ruth Balser. The League appreciates their continued support for the Roundtable and its mission to increase voter education. Lucia Dolan accepted the award on behalf of LWVN. ■

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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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The report of our Local Action Committee was omitted from our Annual Meeting Workbook. I would like to take this space to share their good work.

LWV Local Action Committee Report 2006-07

All members of the Local Action committee again contributed to a major effort providing critical review of projects seeking CPA funds as well as monitoring the deliberations and activities of the Community Preservation Committee. We reviewed and commented on the annual CP Plan, testified at the public hearings, observed every working meeting, and published reports, testimony and some observer notes in the LWV Newsletter. Our contributions were noted with appreciation by both members of the CPC and many aldermen. Some CPC members were heard to ask applicants "and have you addressed all of the League of Women Voters' questions?"

In addition, the committee heard from regular observers at the Parks and Recreation Commission, (Priscilla Leith); Long Range Planning Committee (BOA) (Lucia Dolan); and the Election Commission (Nancy Criscitiello), as well as from the Environmental Issues committee and representatives from the Energy Commission. On several occasions, the League spoke in support of municipal implementation of the city's Energy Action Plan.

After hearing from proponents of mandatory sidewalk snow clearing at the January topic meeting, we began to organize around a possible re-institution of a sidewalk snow clearing ordinance. Local Action members have been calling aldermen on the Public Facilities committee to sound them out. We have approached the Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force and PTO Council about working together to this end.

As city finances continue to strain under ever increasing insurance and labor costs in disproportion to constrained revenues, the CPA fund is targeted by an increasing number of city departments and wider community needs, not all appropriate according to the specific intent of the state law. It is our committee's recommendation that the League continue its vigilant oversight of the Community preservation program in Newton, but also observe and consider the larger scope of city programs and facilities that need attention and resources to maintain.

It must be said that much of the work of this committee was due to the leadership, hard work and dedication of Andreae Downs, particularly in coordinating the work of the CPA review. Andreae had to resign from the LWV Board and this committee mid winter due to a job conflict. Thank you Andreae for all of your good work! Thank you Committee!

Members: AnnaMaria Abernathy, Deb Crossley, Lucia Dolan, George Foord, Andrea Kelley, Amelia Koch, Priscilla Leith, Roberta Leviton, Jennifer Stoner (chair), Myra Tattenbaum and Terry Yoffie.

*Sue Rosenbaum
LWVN, President ■*

Can you explain the new MA Health Care Law?

LWVM provides us with answers to this question

Chapter 58 was enacted in April 2006 to increase the number of Massachusetts residents covered by health insurance. It established the Massachusetts Health Connector Authority which is charged with helping Massachusetts residents and businesses find and pay for health insurance. Some non-citizens will have the choice of any coverage type, while others will only be eligible for certain types. Non-documented immigrants will be eligible only for emergency medical expenses.

The law specifies that The Connector Authority Board (commonly called The Connector Board) shall consist of: the Secretary for Administration and Finance, who shall act as chairperson; the Director of Medicaid; the Commissioner of Insurance; the Executive Director of the Group Insurance Commission; 3 members appointed by the governor (a member in good standing of the American Academy of Actuaries, a health economist, and a small business person) and three appointed by the Attorney General (an employee health benefits plan specialist, a representative of a health consumer organization, and a representative of organized labor).

The Connector Board and its staff have developed a three-tier plan to cover the uninsured. This plan is to be finalized in June.

FIRST TIER: people earning up to 150% of the federal poverty level (\$30,975 for a family of four; \$15,315 for an individual) are eligible for free insurance if their employer does not offer coverage. The benefits include regular checkups, treatment for sickness and injury, prescription drugs, vision care, mental health or substance abuse treatment, and, for some members, dental care.

SECOND TIER: individuals and families up to 300% of the federal poverty level will be expected to buy insurance only if they can find it at a price the Connector Board believes they can pay.

THIRD TIER: Individuals and families (those above 300% of the federal poverty level) in the state's median income range and above will be expected to buy health insurance available through the insurance industry.

This plan is to be revised yearly as needed.

The Connector Board also agreed to offer seven insurance policies to those in the second tier. Premiums will increase as the age of the insured increases. Monthly premiums for a 37-year-old individual range from \$175 to \$288. The least expensive, the Neighborhood Health Plan, stipulates for a 37-year old individual, a \$175 premium per month, a \$2000 annual deductible, a \$5000 out-of-pocket maximum, a \$2000 deductible for inpatient hospitalization plus 20% of the remainder of the bill, \$100 copays for outpatient hospital services after deductible has been met, \$25 copays which don't count against the deductible for doctor's office visits, \$100 deductible for prescription drugs, then \$15 co-pays for 30-day supplies. The policies were offered for sale on May 1, 2007, and it is possible for people to seek waivers from being required to buy insurance they feel they cannot afford. Without waivers, people who do not buy the available insurance will be subject to the loss of their personal income deductions. Three preventive visits and prescriptions are included in these policies. The plan does not include bulk purchase of, and negotiated prices for drugs.

Chapter 58 also calls for businesses with more than ten employees to provide health care insurance plans (in which employers pay at least part of the premiums) for their employees or else be fined \$295 per employee. So far standards have not been set for the policies to be offered by employers.

The implementation of Chapter 58 has already insured at least 60,000 of the previously uninsured people who earn up to 150% of the federal poverty level. It has also expanded dental and eye care to children in low-income families. July 1, 2007 is currently the deadline for individuals and families to obtain insurance coverage. Businesses who don't comply by December 30, 2007 will be subject to penalties.

The money to pay for this plan is to come from federal funding and the free care pool, as well as from premiums, co-pays, deductibles and coinsurance. To continue getting almost \$400 million in federal funds, Massachusetts must renegotiate its agreement with the federal government, and Congress, with the consent of the President, will have to

Continued on page 6

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**

Jane Leighton Award

2007 Jane Leighton Volunteer of the Year – Andrae Downs

The 2007 recipient of this award has contributed to the Newton League in ways that are generous and large, and which exemplify all of those qualities that we so admire in Jane.



ANDRAE & FAMILY
l-r SUSANNAH, PAUL,
JULIETTE AND
ANDRAE

This year's winner was raised by a family who were involved in community, engaged in government and active in the League of Women Voters. This was a family where civics and politics were part of the routine household buzz. Her interest in community issues began early and shaped her life and career choices.

From her Maine childhood, she traveled to California, where she earned her bachelor's degree in journalism. We are fortunate she came back to Massachusetts, to try her hand as a writer and editor, and finally settle in Newton.

She brings to the League a passion for civic involvement and an experience informed by many years of community service as well as activism on a wide array of issues. She is a true believer in a properly run election and regularly works at the polls during city elections.

Although she has strong opinions on some issues, she has both a reporter's nose for news, and genuine appreciation for the nitty gritty, fact-finding, consensus building - and long - process that engages and guides us in the League, as well as a real affection for the League community and mission. She listens well and honestly to others, incorporates constructive criticism better than most, and so gains the benefit of the talents of others who respect and enjoy working with her so much.

More than willing to serve, we see this woman take on ever more, move the process forward - get the job done. She has served on the League board contributing her time and talents to voters' service, as an observer and recorder, a writer and editor, an organizer and a leader. She has researched and written on numerous subjects, producing countless articles for the Newsletter. She has organized and led unit meetings, assisted with League events, and generally pitches in whenever there is a need. If you are overwhelmed or have a conflict, this is the busy person you can count on to fill the gap.



JANE LEIGHTON
& BETH LOWD
ENJOY THE EVENT

As local action chairperson, she did a masterful job. As the good reporter she is, she keeps us well informed as the public process unfolds. She gets right down to business – keys tapping, searching the net... She has been known to follow up with information back to the committee by the time we get home from a meeting at her house! Check the facts, assimilate and acknowledge the views and opinions of others, - but meet the deadline! She embraces league process at its best, thereby moving us to a better understanding of the issue at hand.



ANNE BERWICK
SHARES HER
RESPONSIBILITIES
IN THE PATRICK
ADMINISTRATION

This was most evident in her coordinating the League's monitoring of the Community Preservation Act. Now a vigorous and strong-minded committee of at least ten members, Andreae – always with good humor - pulled it all together – prodding, pushing and pulling until we achieved agreement, then speaking for the League with dignity and grace under pressure.

She talks the talk – and walks the walk – although you are more likely to see her riding her bicycle, taking public transportation...or bumming a ride.

Principled, poised and passionate, the woman from a one car household transports (usually pedaling) herself with ease from meeting to meeting, issue to issue. You see her everywhere - she gets to every meeting.

Somehow Andreae does all of this while attending to the business of a full household, with her husband Paul, and two very busy daughters, Susannah and Juliette. An active family life that includes extensive travel to exotic locations around the globe whenever they can, and the many and unending activities of parenting.

Andreae's tireless efforts have reinforced the perception in our community of the League as an organization with intelligence and integrity. We will miss you on the League board as you pursue your career in objective reporting for the Globe, but know that you will always be there for us.

The 2007 Jane Leighton Volunteer of the year Award is given with great appreciation for all that you do for the League – to Andreae Downs.

Presentation by Deb Crossley ■



DEB CROSSLEY
& VERNE VANCE
DISCUSS THE
IMPORTANCE OF
ENERGY DESIGN

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.

Charter Reform

Continued from page one

Legal and Political Process:

There are three ways to change the charter:

- A. The Board of Aldermen can originate the changes, which are subject to a vote by the citizenry. This would encompass only modest changes.
- B. The Aldermen can develop legislation that specifies modest changes – no change in the terms or composition of the legislative and executive branches. This would then go to the State legislature for a vote. A vote by the citizenry would also be required, but we're not sure if it happens before or after the legislature votes.
- C. Citizens create a petition to elect a charter commission, which is signed by 15% of registered voters. This is done during the normal election cycle, not in a special election, and can encompass more substantial change. Nine members of the public are elected to the commission during the same election.

Once approved, the commission members are given a small stipend, staff support, an office, and public meeting space. The commission can also use outside resources. Within 16 months, the group needs to issue a preliminary report. The State Attorney General reviews the report and gives an opinion. Eighteen months after the creation of the commission, a final report is presented to the Board of Aldermen. The recommendations go on the ballot during the next election cycle for an up or down vote by the City.

Newton citizens are once again considering reforming our charter. On May 31, 2007 there was an initial meeting of a potential study group called together by former alderman John Stewart. The purpose was to take a serious look at the current structure and process of government in Newton and to examine what works well and what can be improved. On June 7, the BOA Programs and Services Committee decided "No Action Necessary" on a charter change proposal. Stay tuned. ■

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! ■



Continued from page 3

OUR NEW HEALTH CARE LAW

provide funds for the increased number of children to be covered. The \$605 million from the free-care pool can be shifted only if many people currently seeking aid under this program get insurance coverage. Plus, a surcharge of up-to-5% will be levied on premiums to pay for the salaries of the 22-member staff of The Connector Board, half of whose salaries range from \$100,000 to \$225,000.

The Health Care Committee will continue to update you and we ask you also to observe what is happening The LWVUS health care goals are: quality health care; affordability; universal coverage, equitable distribution of care; economical delivery of care including reduction of administrative costs, advancement of medical research and technology; reasonable total cost; and financing through general taxation. We also ask you to share with your health care committee and your legislators how the implementation of this bill is affecting you and the people you know. ■

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LWVN CALENDAR

June

- 1-2 Friday and Saturday, LWVM Convention
- 5 Tuesday, 6:45p.m. Legislative Roundtable, NewTV
- 27 Wednesday, 6-9 p.m. 2007-08 LWVN Board Orientation at the home of Terry Yoffie, 363 Waverly Ave. 617-965-1796.

July

- 10 Tuesday 6:30 p.m. Working Board Potluck at the home of Sue Flicop, 163 Suffolk Rd., Chestnut Hill, 617-232-2310
- 13 Friday 9:00 a.m. Local Action Committee at the home of Lucia Dolan, 20 Devon Rd., Newton Centre, 617-332-1893
- 24 Tuesday 7:30 p.m. Board Meeting at the home of Sue Rosenbaum, 121 Winslow Rd. Waban, 617-332-0306

WINE & CHEESE MEETS THE MARK

Sharyn Roberts and Sharon Stout

It's tradition: League members always like to come away from an event having seen friends, met people and learned something new. And something special to taste is an also a mark of a successful event.

Such was the case on Sunday, April 29th, when we enjoyed the Wine and Cheese Fundraising Event. A congenial group of men and women attended, Author Vicki Donlan spoke on Her Turn, Why It's Time for Women to Lead in America,

A. Russo' & Sons for contributed flowers and tasty cheese, Silver Lake Liquors contributed a variety of wines, and Eastern Bank served as a corporate sponsor.

Our appreciation goes to all our supporters. ■

League of Women Voters of Newton

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