
League of Women Voters of Newton

Newsletter

Volume 14, Issue 7

October 2008

Charter Commission Again?

by Terry Yoffie

First, a little history - - in 1969, 1997, 2007, and now in 2008, the League of Women Voters has engaged with the City Charter.

In 1969, the LWVN led a successful drive for a Charter Commission and successfully revised the Charter under the capable leadership of Florence Rubin. In 1997 and 2007, the League faced the same question again but after careful consideration, the League chose to sit it out.

This year, two members, Tom Sheff and Anatol Zukerman, approached the League Board, asking us to engage with them on Charter reform. Forming a Charter Commission and monitoring its work are a major commitment of time and effort; we need to weigh the impact on current and promised program plans for 2008 and beyond.

Before we discuss if a Charter Commission should be formed, the League Board believes that we need to launch a study of the Charter, to pair the study with citizen education forums and

to end with consensus about whether the Charter should be reformed and in what ways. Since Tom and Anatol approached us after the 2008-9 program plan was approved at annual meeting, we are required to follow our bylaws for any program change proposals. I will address this in the section on what the board recommends below.

What are the Benefits?

There is no question that it is worthwhile to consider the City Charter and its effectiveness periodically. In fact, it has been almost 40 years since the League last studied the Charter and we can argue that it is overdue. It makes sense to consider the effectiveness of the Charter relative to current City needs and services, especially under the current challenging fiscal circumstances we face:

- Does our current Charter help or hinder city life and government operations?
- Has it assured that risk is identified and managed well?
- Have city assets been well managed under the current Charter?

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October Topic Meeting

A Conversation with Newton's Citizen Advisory Group (CAG)

CAG members Malcolm S. Salter, Chair; Ruthanne Fuller, Vice Chair; and George Foord will join us for an update on the CAG's work.

Please come with your questions & suggestions.

Wednesday October 22 2008

11:30am – 1:30 pm

NOTE DATE CHANGE

At the NewTV Conference Room (no cameras)
23 Needham Street, Newton Highlands
(Go up Easy Street, next to National Lumber)
Handicapped accessible. Bring your lunch!

LWVN is holding a special

Open Member Meeting

We will discuss amending the League's 2008/09 Program to include a study of the City Charter

Wednesday, October 29
7:00-8:00 pm at NewTV
23 Needham Street

Please see the article on page 7 of this newsletter for more information.

All League memberships now run from September to August. If you haven't already, please pay your bill for 2008/09!

FROM THE PRESIDENT

October 2008

Dear League Members,

September started with a bang. Our members worked on voter registration, charter reform, membership, the city's open space plan, observing city committees and task force meetings, and organizing forums and a book talk.



Our League offers nonpartisan opportunities for citizens to register voters. You may have seen us at the farmers markets; we also joined the state League at the GreenFest in Boston on September 28, and we offered students lunchtime opportunities to register to vote at Mt. Ida and Lasell colleges. If you would like to join us, let Sharyn Roberts know at voterservice@lwvnewton.org. After the November election we are launching an Elections Task Force with Craig Manseau, Newton's Election Commission Executive Secretary to review operations in the Elections Department.

Also this month, two League members submitted a request to the board to endorse their efforts to review the City Charter. League policy does not allow the board to vote to endorse any issue without careful study first. Further, the proposal to change our annual program between annual meetings requires that we ask League members to approve such a change in program. Therefore, the board voted on September 18 to recommend to our members that we begin studying the city charter in lieu of pursuing our work on the capital budget and municipal employee health insurance as approved at annual meeting for 2008-09. The board suggests that members consider the following questions:

- What aspects of the Charter, if any, need revision?
- What method of revision is most effective?
- Should a Charter Review Commission be established or should the Charter be revised by amendment?

There will be an open meeting to discuss a study of the City Charter with members on Wednesday, October 29 at 7pm at NewTV. Look for the article on charter reform later in this newsletter for more information.

Anne Borg, vice president of operations, has been busy revising our procedures for membership development and outreach. You should all have received notices by mail to renew your membership as part of our attempts to place all members on the same renewal cycle to streamline operations and allow for more effective membership outreach. We look forward to your participation in this new system and expect that it will help make your involvement with the League simpler. If you have any concerns about the new system, let Anne know at the League phone or by email at operations@lwvnewton.org

We learned last month that the city's Open Space Plan needs revision in order to bring Newton into compliance with state requirements. We understand that the Planning Department has delegated this work to a staff person and a volunteer. Given the fiscal constraints faced by the city and the workload faced by the Planning Department, this work will be scheduled when staff time is available. The League understands that without a current Open Space Plan, Newton is not eligible for certain state grant funds. We raised our concerns about losing potential grant monies given the difficult financial constraints that the City is facing this budget year and next.

We have observers attending several city meetings, taking notes on committee- and task force proceedings. Expect to see observer notes published in future newsletters.

Finally, we have organized two important events:

- **November 16**, from 11am to 1:30pm at the Newton Jewish Community Center at 333 Nahanton St.: former Vermont Governor Madeleine Kunin, Senator Cynthia Creem, Representative Marian Walsh, and other politically engaged women will speak. Governor Kunin will start by talking about her book *Pearls, Politics, and Power: Women Can Win and Lead*. Following a book signing, Governor Kunin, Senator Creem, Representative Walsh, and others will discuss with us how to encourage more women to run for public office and the basics of how to run. We are proud to cosponsor the event with the JCCs of Greater Boston and the Boston and Needham Leagues of Women Voters.
- **November 20**, we will be holding a public forum on *Cash in the Trash* at the Newton Free Library from 7 - 9 p.m. The speakers will be Brooke Nash, Branch Chief, Municipal Waste Reduction, Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection, and Tom Daley, Newton DPW Commissioner. We are proud to co-sponsor the event with the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce, Green Decade, Newton TAB, Newton Free Library, Newton Solid Waste Commission, Newton for Fiscal Responsibility, and others.

We hope to see you at both events.

Respectfully,

Terry Yoffie, President, League of Women Voters, Newton

ACTION ALERT from LWV MA

OPPOSE “A PROPOSED LAW TO ELIMINATE THE STATE INCOME TAX”

VOTE NO on BALLOT QUESTION 1

Question 1 is the proposed law to eliminate the state income tax. Citizens will vote on this initiative at the polls November 4th. This binding referendum will take **\$12.7 billion - nearly 40 percent – out of the state budget** as of January 2009. This would drive up property taxes and lead to drastic cuts in local and state services. The League considers Question 1 to be a reckless proposal that could increase local property taxes, cause sweeping cuts in education, cripple our public safety departments, and speed the deterioration of our infrastructure. We encourage all citizens of the state to **Vote NO on Question 1** in the interest of preserving vital services for the citizens of Massachusetts.

Reasons to Vote NO on Question 1

- Elimination of the state income tax will result in \$12.7 billion being removed from the state's tax base, more than a third of the state's \$27 billion budget. The state would raise the sales tax and fees to make up for the decreased funding.
- The federal government requires matching funds from the state for several types of aid. If funding is cut to programs such as Medicaid on the state level, the federal funding will also be eliminated and lead to probable lawsuits against the state for failing to fulfill government mandates.
- State aid to local government (the majority of which is earmarked for K-12 education) would suffer a 40 percent cut in funding, forcing towns to either roll back services or seek more overrides, increasing the property tax to maintain basic services.
- Public Safety will be at risk, with fewer emergency response personnel, longer 911 wait times and fewer police officers and fire fighters as first responders.
- Education will suffer. This means not only limited academic tutoring, arts activities, after-school programs, and sports opportunities for our children, but also fewer teachers for required classes, larger classroom sizes and more school closings.
- Infrastructure will deteriorate, with less money for our roads, bridges and public transportation systems. This would mean more crumbling roadways, potholes and repair bills for drivers and a greater risk of train derailments and bridge collapses.
- Healthcare services will be cut, affecting senior citizens, working families and people with disabilities. Federal Medicare matching funds will be lost if the state does not contribute its share.
- Businesses might not invest in a state that won't even invest in itself.

REGISTER to VOTE!

The deadline to register to vote for the November 4 election is Wed., Oct. 15.

Drive people to the polls!

Please contact Sharyn L. Roberts, LWVN Vice President for Voter Service at 617-969-9588 or voterservice@lwnnewton.org.

**And... DON'T FORGET TO VOTE
November 4!**

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts

Presents Fall Conference 2008

Finding the Common Wealth

Saturday, October 18, 2008

9:00 am – 3:00 pm, Registration 8:15 am

Crowne Plaza Worcester

10 Lincoln Square, Worcester

Featured Speakers:

Lt. Governor Tim Murray and Senator Harriette Chandler

Morning and Afternoon Workshops

Cost: \$40 (includes lunch)

Register online at www.lwvma.org

Or please contact LWV MA at 617-523-2999; Email:

lwvma@lwvma.org

The Newton League will be hosting a

Debate Party!

for the 3rd Presidential Debate

Wednesday, October 15, 2008

Come join us from 8pm until after the
debate ends

Anne Borg's house, 155 Winchester St



You can also organize a
Debate-Watching Party!

The presidential race is in the home stretch, and **the debates have begun** – and it's your chance to become even more informed about the candidates and their positions. Gather your friends, colleagues, and family for a debate watching party so they, too, can understand the issues at hand and be active participants in our democracy.

Use the National League's Debate Watching Party Kit to get started!

The kit has everything you need to enjoy and get the most out of the debates, including:

- A music playlist
- Recipes (try the red, white and blue parfaits!)
- A sign-in sheet for your guests (a great time to encourage your guests to register to vote!)
- Debate watching party tips for hosts...and so much more!

There is much at stake this election year. But, regardless of which candidate you support, the League of Women Voters will make sure that you're prepared for the debates and to cast your vote this fall.

Get your debate kit today!

Log onto: <http://www.lwv.org>

Notes from the "Cash for Trash" Topic Meeting

By Anne Borg

On September 10, The League welcomed Newton's Tom Daley, Commissioner of Public Works, and Elaine Gentile, Director of Environmental Affairs, to talk about Newton's solid waste system.

Commissioner Daley gave us some cost basics. There are two costs for curbside trash pickup: collection *and* disposal. Curbside recycling has only one cost: collection. Recycling earns revenue for Newton; paper, plastics, and metal all have high value. The markets for these recycled items are strong and expanding. It costs Newton \$152/ton to dispose of our trash for a total of \$4.4 million each year. Recycling paper *earns* Newton \$500,000 each year.

Municipalities all over Massachusetts and the US are looking into ways to streamline solid waste collection and cut costs. Two popular options are *automated trash collection* (often paired with *single stream recycling*) and *Pay-As-You-Throw* (P.A.Y.T). Both options increase recycling and decrease the amount of trash.

In June, the City's trash contract expired. The City has had the same, very favorable contract for 20 years. In order to give the City more time to study different options, and to have the trash and recycling contracts coincide, the trash contract was extended for two years, to June 2010.

On November 3, the City is initiating a pilot program of automated trash collection in certain areas of the City. Elaine Gentile explained in detail how it will work. Each household in the pilot program area will be given a 64 gallon trash cart. All trash must be placed in the cart; the carts have wheels and are animal-proof. The pilot program will also feature single-stream recycling. Residents can put all recycled items in one container – paper can be placed in the same recycle bins as glass, metal and plastic. Each household can have up to four of the City's recycle bins or they can take an old trash can, put a "RECYCLE" sticker on it, and use that for recycling.

The areas for the pilot program were chosen to demonstrate the ability of automated collection in different conditions. The characteristics of the neighborhoods chosen vary; some feature narrow streets, hills, dead ends, density, streets with many parked cars, etc. The pilot program will last until April, so it will encompass the winter months.

Thank you to Tom Daley and Elaine Gentile for a very interesting *and* informative meeting.

(We will discuss P.A.Y.T. in a later article.)

Do You Have Questions about Question 1?

We have some answers!

Join the League as we learn more about
Question 1 and the consequences for all
of us if it passes on Nov. 4

Sunday, October 19
4:30 – 6:00 pm

Ald. Vicki Danberg's house
30 Chase Street, Newton Centre

Community Preservation Committee Seeks Community Input

Newton's Community Preservation Committee is holding public hearings this fall to solicit community help in setting its funding priorities and shaping the future of CPA in Newton.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) requires that a minimum of 10% of the annual revenues of the fund be used for each of the act's three core community purposes: preservation of open space, creation of affordable housing, and preservation of historic buildings and landscapes. The other 70% can be spent on any of these three purposes, as well as on creation of land for recreation.

The first public hearing has already been held. The next two hearings are:

Historic resources: Wed., October 22, 7pm, Druker Auditorium, Newton Free Library

Open space and recreation: Wed., November 19, 7pm, City Hall Cafeteria

For more information please see the CPC website:
<http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/Planning/CPA/NewtonCPC-plan-hearings-fall08.pdf>

CAG Background

Mayor David Cohen, Board of Alderman President Lisle Baker, and School Committee Chair Dori Zaleznik have formed a Citizen Advisory Group "to assist in planning for additional tactics and strategies to improve the City's operational efficiency and effectiveness in future fiscal years including the functions of the Executive, School Committee, and Aldermanic branches of Newton's government." The convening of this advisory group is in response to a resolution passed by the Board of Aldermen, which asked them to appoint this group prior to May 20, 2008 when the citizens of Newton voted on an override request.

In forming the group, the Mayor Cohen, President Baker, and School Committee Chair Zaleznik relied on the recommendations of their colleagues to create an advisory group with a mix of skills and abilities, and sought residents who had not served in Newton elective office before. The Citizen Advisory Group is chaired by Newton resident Malcolm Salter, a former Senior Associate Dean and chaired Professor at the Harvard Business School.

The Group's preliminary charge is:

- To help define the choices facing the City with respect to municipal and educational service levels and their long-term funding requirements.
- To help identify, within this context, innovative ways of increasing short- and long-term operational efficiency and effectiveness, and developing new or enhanced sources of funding for City services—including the people, facilities, and equipment that make the delivery of such services possible.
- To make sufficient progress in these tasks by the end of this calendar year so that the Mayor, the School Committee, and the Board of Aldermen will be able to integrate promising strategies and actions into the process of planning for the fiscal 2010 budget and beyond.

(Information from the City of Newton website)

SAVE THE DATE

More Trash Talk!

On Thursday, November 20, at 7pm at the Druker Auditorium, Newton Free Library, the LWVN and several co-sponsors will hold a public forum on solid waste options for the city.

Sustainable Newton Committee

by Sharyn Roberts, League Liaison

The mission of the Sustainable Newton Committee (SNC) is to advise the Mayor on developing a long-term vision for sustainable environmental stewardship. The committee meets on the third Tuesday of every month at 8:00 am at City Hall.

The goals of this committee are to work with existing environmental organizations and city department heads to find opportunities to collaborate and support all environmental and sustainable issues and to discuss and agree on:

- ◆ Recommendations to the Mayor on ways to integrate and coordinate efforts related to energy efficiency, renewable resources, waste reduction and recycling, global warming, education, and high performance building and sustainable practices,;
- ◆ Recommendations to the Mayor on ways to promote continuous environmental improvement by evaluating the impacts of actions by government, business and residents on natural resources and the community;
- ◆ Policy recommendations for the Mayor for overall environmental stewardship in general and sustainability in particular.

Recently, the committee has been looking into:

- ◆ Uses for gray water
- ◆ Energy recycling
- ◆ Ways to encourage residents to save energy and reduce pollution as part of the city's proposed Energy Action Plan
- ◆ Life cycle costing for public construction projects, and architectural salvage and materials reuse
- ◆ Sustainable and green building standards for commercial and large scale residential developments through special permitting
- ◆ An "environmental" seat on the Design Review Committee
- ◆ Supporting the energy-related zoning amendments
- ◆ Recommending changes to the city noise ordinance regarding the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers
- ◆ Community Preservation Committee projects
- ◆ Working with the Solid Waste Commission on approving the upcoming City waste removal contracts to pull more out of the waste stream and into recycling
- ◆ Working with the Energy Commission on joining the EPA's Community Energy Challenge to share progress on climate, global warming, and sustainability efforts.

The committee is also looking into adopting bylaws and applicable regulations such as those for the Energy and Solid Waste Commissions, to make the Sustainable Newton Committee a permanent Mayoral Advisory Committee.

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Topic Meetings

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To receive an **audio version** of this Newsletter, call Terry Yoffie at 617-965-1796.

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 or visit www.lwvnewton.org.

BRUNCH WITH MADELINE M. KUNIN

Pearls, Politics and Power: How Women Can Win and Lead
in conversation with Robin Young
Sunday, November 16, 2008, 11:00am

The Boston Jewish Book Fair is honored to present the first Jewish woman to be elected as governor of any state. Madeline M. Kunin was elected to three terms as the governor of Vermont and served as the Deputy Secretary of Education and Ambassador to Switzerland under President Bill Clinton. Join us for a fascinating discussion about women's role in government and contemporary leadership

Robin Young is the award-winning host of WBUR's *Here and Now*. She has hosted the *Today Show* and *CBS Morning* and is best known to Boston audiences for her part in launching the popular *Evening Magazine* on WBZ-TV.

Admission: \$12 general; \$10 JCC member / LWVN member.

LWVN is a co-sponsor of this important program.

Charter? Continued from page 1

Additionally, we have city elections in the fall of 2009 when we will vote on who will be mayor and members of the Board of Aldermen and School Committee. Currently, we are watching a major review of city operations by the Citizens Advisory Group. The League board looks forward to the group's findings and recommendations over the next few months. One of the considerations of the Citizens Advisory Group is how decisions are made and prioritized in Newton. We expect to look to their recommendations as we begin our efforts, should members choose to endorse the proposed City Charter study. Further, the school department and the School Committee are working through a strategic planning exercise. It seems like an opportune time to take a look at the Charter as we plan services and operations for the next five years.

Another benefit is that a Charter study could engage citizens in a community conversation about what we want our city to be in the future. This conversation is long overdue and critical to helping city officials set priorities for allocating limited resources. Certain issues, such as the size of the Board of Aldermen, will not be dealt with unless a Charter Commission is formed to review and revise the Charter. It is also possible that the League's engagement with such a study will attract new members--always an important consideration as we work to assure the future of the organization.

What are the Costs?

First, the group that approached the League has gathered approximately 1,500 signatures in its effort to get the question of a Charter Commission placed on the ballot for November, 2009. The deadline for submitting the petition is June, so there is plenty of time to complete the signature drive for the required 7,800 certified signatures. The Charter reform supporters' petition question reads "We, request that the (city, town) of Newton to revise its present charter or adopt a new charter....."

So, what are the costs? We believe that the petition is premature: most voters have no idea of what the city charter is, let alone whether it works and if it is effective. Secondly, most

voters are more concerned about whether we have adequate resources to maintain city services rather than whether there should be a different model of government to run the city. Many feel that much of the city's problems stem from weak leadership at the executive level and that elections will resolve this issue. If a League study of the Charter is approved, we may find after significant effort that not much in the Charter needs to be changed. The tradeoff we are considering is that we switch direction away from reviewing City financial issues.

What does the Board recommend and our bylaws require?

At our September 18 board meeting, a motion passed stating: "The League Board recommends to our members that the 2008 program be changed by undertaking a study of the City Charter in order to determine whether to support the establishment of an official Charter Commission. This study would be performed in place of the Municipal Finance program plan voted on at Annual Meeting. "

Our bylaws outline the next steps for changing League program between annual meetings. The bylaws require that two open member meetings be held to consider a program plan change. The first meeting is scheduled for **October 29** at NewTV from 7 to 8pm to answer members' questions about the proposed study and the impact on our annual program. The second meeting would take the vote on the program change. The board is recommending that we consider taking the vote via email and mail in lieu of a second meeting.

So your board is asking you to consider two matters.:

1. Should we change our 2008 program to launch a study of the City Charter?
2. Can we take the vote by email and mail instead of holding a second meeting to vote?

Please come to discuss this proposed program plan change on October 29 and determine if you want to hold a second meeting or vote by mail and email. For more information, call 617-964-0014 or email Terry Yoffie at president@lwnvnewton.org.

A Visit with Diane Jeffery, President of LWV MA

From August 28 minutes taken by Gail Glick

Before the August 28 Newton League of Women Voters board meeting, attendees were pleased to meet with Diane Jeffery, President of LWV-MA, to informally discuss issues and information of common concern. Diane updated us on state League-sponsored events and forums and urged LWVN to post its events on the state League's website. We discussed ways to grow our membership, both in numbers and mix, as well as how to encourage members to become more active. Diane mentioned that LWV-Boston has a younger constituency, and that some local leagues conduct fundraisers in order to subsidize the cost of annual membership dues (by doing so, some leagues are able to charge \$35 for annual membership as compared to Newton's \$55, which may be steep for some potentially interested individuals).

Diane also informed us that the LWV-MA office has prepared articles, events, power point presentations, and forums specifically for the local leagues to utilize/customize for their own programs (e.g., a "packaged" presentation that can be shown on local cable TV concerning Ballot Question 1 – repealing state income tax – with already prepared and printed fact sheets). By making available an array of prepared programs, the local leagues are able to maximize their program offerings and also eliminate duplication of effort. She also noted that the upcoming presidential campaign presents many opportunities for local league action.

Diane also urged local members to volunteer to work on the state League committees, as it serves as excellent training for those interested in becoming future state leaders.

LWVN CALENDAR

OCTOBER

- 6th Mon., 5:30-8:30 pm, **Phonathon**, Coldwell Banker, 1261 Centre St, Newton Centre, dinner provided
- 10th Fri., morning, **Local Action Comm.** at Deb Crossley's 26 Circuit Ave, check online calendar for exact time
- 15th Wed., 8:00 pm, **Debate Party** at Anne Borg's house, 155 Winchester St
- 16th Thurs., 5:30-8:30 pm, **Phonathon**, Coldwell Banker, 1261 Centre St, Newton Centre, dinner provided
- 18th Sat., 9:00 am-3:00 pm, **LWVMA Fall Conference:** "Finding the Common Wealth," with Lt. Gov. Tim Murray, Crowne Plaza, Worcester
- 22nd Wed., 11:30 am, **Topic Meeting: Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAG)**

OCTOBER, CONT

- 29th Wed., 7:00-8:00 pm, **Open Member Meeting**, NewTV, 23 Needham St

NOVEMBER

- 12th Wed., 11:30 am, **Topic Meeting: Community Preservation Committee**
- 13th Thurs., 7:00 pm, **LWVN Board Meeting** at Anne Borg's, 155 Winchester St
- 14th Fri., morning, **Local Action Comm.** at Anne Borg's, 155 Winchester St, check online calendar for exact time
- 16th Sun., 11:00 am, **Brunch with Madeline M. Kunin**, Newton JCC, 333 Nahanton Street.
- 20th Thurs., 7:00 pm, **Solid Waste Forum**, Druker Auditorium, Newton Free Library

League of Women Voters of Newton

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