
League of Women Voters of Newton

Newsletter

Volume 15, Issue 3

visit us online at www.lwvnewton.org

March/April 2009

How Can We Elect a President by National Popular Vote?

From the Election Commission Task Force

Here's the nub of the question: How best to get the U.S. to the point where a vote for president is counted fairly—in other words, to eliminate the relevance of the Electoral College?

On April 1, the Newton League of Women Voters will meet to review an idea proposed by local leagues across the country and adopted at National Convention this year. Called the National Popular Vote Compact, this idea would allow states to agree among themselves to elect presidents by popular vote.

Each state would have to opt in, and each state could pull out. So far four states have joined, and 19 additional state legislatures are considering joining. States in the compact will continue to award electoral votes in the current manner—mostly winner-take-all—until the compact has been joined by enough states to represent a controlling majority of the Electoral College (270). At that point, member states will certify the popular votes in the compact and all 270

electoral votes will go to the winner of the popular vote.

The LWV US positions already include the elimination of the Electoral College and the election of presidents by popular vote, so the LWVN's April 1 Consensus Meeting will only review the method by which the country might reach these goals, not the goals themselves.

All members interested should attend the lunchtime meeting (we will start at 11:30am sharp and end at 1:30pm) at the NewTV Conference room, on Easy Street, off Needham Street (behind National Tire and next to National Lumber). We will be discussing and coming to consensus (to learn the difference between voting and consensus, visit the LWV US site at www.lwv.org and search for "League Lingo"). Our recommendations will then be forwarded to the LWV US.

Essential background material for the consensus meeting is available through our website, www.lwvnewton.org. Please come, and please arrive informed!

What's Causing Our School Budget Cuts?

Expenses for the Newton Public Schools increase annually by more than the revenue to pay for them according to the Citizen Advisory Group analysis published late in January.

The fastest-growing expenses, according to the School Cost Structure report (available at www.ci.newton.ma.us/CitizenAdvisoryGroup/reports), are health insurance, special education and utilities.

The gap between income and expenses—about 1.3 percent of the budget, or \$2.5 million next year—has already resulted in the erosion of school buildings and increases in class size.

What does Newton value enough to protect from gradual erosion? What areas could be cut to shore up the most essential elements of our public schools? Are there programs

that could be run more efficiently? According to the report, these are the choices—between the *essential* and the *desirable*—that must be made.

Some of the choices the report discusses are reducing the number of staff and teachers; and increasing class size, teacher loads, supervision and teacher development.

Our members have been working hard to present this report in the second of five forums, to be held March 24, from 7–9 pm at the Longyear Museum in Chestnut Hill.

Please attend to learn more, and to join the critical discussion about Newton's values, Newton's future, and education in our city. For details, visit the League of Women Voters of Newton website, <http://www.lwvnewton.org>.

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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 non-partisan political organization. For more information about the League of Women Voters, call 617-964-0014 or visit www.lwvnewton.org.

Affordable Housing in Newton: March 11th LWVN Topic Meeting

by Myra Tattenbaum and Leslie Burg

In an attempt to increase the rate at which Newton is creating affordable housing, a number of community organizations have joined together to form the Housing Action Plan Initiative (HAPI), founded and chaired by Phil Herr, an urban planner, retired MIT professor, and community activist. LWVN Housing Committee co-chairs Myra Tattenbaum and Leslie Burg have been very active in HAPI's work, which focuses on identifying zoning obstacles to creating and building affordable housing. They invited Phil Herr to present and discuss HAPI's work and Alderman Ted Hess-Mahan, a longtime affordable housing advocate, to speak about our Accessory Apartment zoning ordinance at our March 11th Topic Meeting.

Newton's Comprehensive Plan encourages multi-family dwellings near village centers and transportation nodes. However, developers can use the state's 40B ("anti-snob") zoning law to circumvent local zoning rules like these as long as they meet requirements to make a minimum percentage of units affordable. Herr believes that the 40B law needs modification to better support "smart" development.

HAPI has noted that the text of the City's Inclusionary Zoning laws, as well as several zoning ordinances and restrictive regulations governing accessory apartments, also need changing. Herr identified several locations where housing, including affordable units, could be built, including Riverside Station, the Newton Center Fire Station area, and the Austin Street parking lot in Newtonville.

Alderman Ted Hess-Mahan discussed accessory apartments, often known as "in-law" units, which are added to single-family homes to accommodate renters or family members and can allow current owners to stay in place. The city estimates are that there are 1,000 – 2,000 illegal accessory apartments in Newton. These apartments have probably never been inspected, may not have safe egress, and are frequently not up to code.

Currently, there are a number of zoning regulations that make the creation of legal accessory apartments extremely difficult for homeowners. There is data to suggest that if regulations governing accessory apartments were less restrictive, homeowners would be more willing to create legal units and units that are now illegal might be brought into compliance. Alderman Hess-Mahan is planning to file legislation to remedy these limitations.

The LWVN, as a co-sponsor of HAPI, supports its initiatives on Inclusionary Zoning and reuse of public sites. The League's action agenda also includes supporting refinements to the Accessory Apartment Zoning Ordinance.

April Topic Meeting

Consensus Meeting: National Popular Vote Compact

Wednesday, April 1, 11:30 am -1:30 pm

NewTV Conference Room

23 Easy Street, Newton Highlands

(just off Needham St. next to National Lumber)

Brown bag lunches are welcome

See the article on page 1 for more information on this meeting.

LWVN Considering Review of Newton's Charter

By Leslie Burg & Myra Tattenbaum

The Newton League of Women Voters (LWVN) Ad Hoc Committee on Charter Review is proposing that a study of the Newton city charter be included in the LWVN 2009-2010 Program of Action. The Board of Directors recently approved the proposal and it will be voted on at the League's annual meeting in early May.

A municipal charter is a legal document that sets out the form of government for a city or town, including stipulations such as what officials shall be elected, term lengths, and powers, duties and responsibilities. It defines the structure and composition of the various branches of government, Executive and Legislative as well as the School Committee, and spells out the relationships between and among them. A charter may be studied and changed from time to time to ensure that local government continues to function effectively as cities and towns evolve.

Newton's charter was last reviewed close to 40 years ago. A LWVN study begun in 1966 recommended charter reform and the League led the petition drive to elect a charter commission. Our current city charter was approved by voters in 1971 and took effect in January 1972.

Efforts by some within the Newton community suggest there is interest in revisiting the city charter. One group recently requested endorsement by the LWVN Board of Directors for their plan to place the question of charter review on the 2009 ballot. After careful consideration, the Board concluded that such a move is premature.

Opening a municipal charter is serious business. State law that defines the scope and sequence of what must occur when a city or town undertakes a charter review governs the process for just this reason. It includes a significant petition drive; two ballot questions, one at the beginning and one at the end of the process, both to be conducted during regular municipal elections; a strict timeline with specified intervals for reports, meetings, and public hearings; and communications with both the Attorney General and the Department of Housing and Development. It also costs the city money.

Before any ballot initiative is introduced, several things should happen: the current charter should be studied in relation to identified issues in city governance; alternative models of local government should be explored and evaluated to determine whether a change, in whole or in part, of our present model might improve city governance; and the public should be educated about charter review through a variety of mechanisms so that if asked to vote on the issue they will be knowledgeable and able to cast an informed vote.

A non-partisan organization, the LWVN studies and is active in local governmental issues. We work to educate the public about them. By mission and experience, it is particularly well-suited to leading a review of Newton's city charter. We will continue to inform the public as this effort continues.

Warren House Letter to the CPC

March 17, 2009

Dear Ms. Moss:

The League of Women Voters of Newton would like to clarify its support of using \$1,080,000 in CPA funds for slate roof replacement and above roof line masonry and waterproofing repairs at the Warren House, as proposed in the Newton Community Development Foundation (NCDF) application.

LWVN recognizes that this work is essential to preserve the structure, was not accomplished during the initial renovation, and will help to bring maintenance costs under control. We believe this would be a wise investment both to ensure the future of this historic structure and help sustain the much needed mixed income housing within. We feel the cost of the proposed repairs is reasonable given the extent of the work required.

We also urge that funding be secured from other sources to complete the remaining work needed on exterior building elements below the roof line as described in the Gale Engineering Report. To this end, we recommend the petitioner take aggressive steps to refinance the MHFA mortgage. We also urge Warren to explore current state and federal weatherization grants and/or performance contracting arrangements that may expand the work to include better insulating the building as well as high efficiency HVAC equipment. A comprehensive retrofit of this order would serve to further curb operating expenses.

In conclusion, the League supports the CPC recommending funding the Warren request now, and hopes that Warren will seek to complete needed repairs and upgrades in the near future by aggressively seeking outside funds.

Sincerely,

Terry Yoffie, President, LWVN

LWV MA: Day on the Hill 2009

by Sue Rosenbaum

“Aiming for Transparency: Restoring the Public’s Trust” was the theme for this year’s Day on the Hill, an annual event sponsored by the LWV of Massachusetts.

During the morning, the speakers discussed the importance of the Open Meeting Law and how we could ensure that our own municipal governments follow it and pay attention to their citizens. The first speaker, District Attorney William Keating, noted that it is difficult to get new bills passed and encouraged those hoping to pass new legislation to do their homework, know their allies, and anticipate their opposition.

Judith Meredith, Executive Director of the Public Policy Institute, noted that legislators often act differently when they know their constituents are watching them, emphasizing that it is important to let legislators know you’re watching.

Janet Domenitz, Executive Director of MassPIRG, told citizens to ignore their legislators if they say, “It is very complicated, you really don’t understand all the complexities of the law.” It doesn’t take a Ph.D. in organic chemistry to understand that toxins should not be allowed in baby food, she said, it just takes common sense. Citizens who want to pass legislation should not be scared away by elected officials. They will need to work hard and might want to enlist an expert in the topic to help make their case, but the most important thing is to be persistent.

Last, Pam Wilmot, the Executive Director of Common Cause, talked about campaign finance reform, redistricting, and election reform, all issues in which the League and Common Cause share an interest. She cautioned that the government belongs to the people and we must guard it vigilantly.

After hearing from the panelists, we heard from League specialists about the legislative priorities of the State League, including preserving affordable housing; changing mandatory drug sentence minimums and promoting treatment over incarceration for low-level offenders; continuing to oppose casino gambling; easing restrictions on absentee voting and passing same-day voter registration; and ensuring equitable disability coverage for women for non-work related claims.

After the morning session, our delegation had lunch with Newton’s state legislators to discuss these issues and others. Senator Creem and Representatives Balser, Khan, and Koutoujian all joined us for a discussion about affordable housing in Newton; ways to bring in more revenue, possibly by selling the air rights over the Mass Pike; trying to increase PILOTs from universities other than Boston College; a bill Senator Creem recently filed to modify the CPA law; and transportation issues. We advocated for a more bike and pedestrian friendly city as well as changes that would alleviate bad traffic areas. All in all, it was a very productive and collegial day.

Ca\$h in the Tra\$h II

By Lucia Dolan

Join the League Tuesday, April 7th, at 7 pm in the Druker Auditorium of the Newton Free Library for a public forum on trash, recycling and Newton. Tom Daley, Newton’s new Commissioner of the Department of Public Works, will describe results from Newton’s pilot program for single-stream recycling and automated trash pick-up. He will also discuss future plans for the city’s trash program.

Following Commissioner Daley, Kevin Dutt from Newton’s Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) will discuss the environmental as well as fiscal benefits associated with the CAG’s proposal for a Pay as You Throw trash program in Newton. The evening will conclude with a question and answer session moderated by Brooke Lipsitt, former president of the Newton Board of Aldermen.

This forum is organized by the Environmental Issues Committee of the League of Women Voters of Newton and is co-sponsored by the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce, Green Decade, Newton 20/20, the *Newton TAB*, the Newton Free Library, the Newton Solid Waste Commission and Newton for Fiscal Responsibility.

Sidewalk Snow Removal

From the *ad hoc Sidewalk Snow Removal Committee*



It’s March, which means the League is thinking about snow.

Through the winter, League members had several meetings with members of the Bike and Pedestrian Task Force, the PTO Council, Safe Routes to School and Green Decade to examine the obstacles to good sidewalk snow clearance in Newton.

We have researched sidewalk snow clearing ordinances as well as educational and enforcement measures in other cities and towns in Massachusetts and further afield. We have talked with Aldermen about their positions on the current proposed ordinance. And we hope to meet soon with the three-Alderman “snow committee” that has also been looking at the issue. Our committee is encouraging the city to create a pilot snow clearing program for trial by next winter. Those interested in the issue should contact Bonnie Carter at 617-969-0686 or bonniehcarter@aol.com.

From the President

February 2009

Dear League Members,

This past month, the LWVN has continued its work in several areas. All program and action committees are preparing their annual reports and plans for 2009 – 2010 for Annual Meeting, May 7. These will be mailed to all members in April. On the action front, members have been working on sidewalk snow and ice removal in the city; on how city elections are managed; on increasing affordable housing options in the city; and with the Citizen Advisory Group to educate residents about the state of the city's finances.

In addition, I have been part of very early discussions with Newbury College to pilot a college member group there. We are working with the Brookline and Boston Leagues on this effort to build a program we hope eventually will be adopted at colleges around the area. I will report on this as we move ahead with the work.

Our Next Citizen Advisory Group Forum Is Coming Up

We offered our first forum on the Citizen Advisory Group's work in February. The forum explained the basics and challenges of city revenues and we learned that there are few short term solutions to help relieve the current mismatch of our expenditures and revenue growth rates. The current approach that Newton takes to providing services is not working and cannot be sustained. Some historic solutions we have used to finance services while balancing the city's budget have been to underinvest in maintaining buildings and to slowly but methodically reduce staff and programs. However, little public discussion has been held about citizens' preferences and priorities.

We are grateful to Mal Salter (chair of the CAG), Ruthanne Fuller (co-chair of the CAG) and Scott Oran (Chair of the Revenue Subcommittee) for working with us to present the group's findings and recommendations at the February forum. The CAG and LWVN plan to offer further public discussions about the city's future. At our next forum on March 24, we look forward to the School Cost Structure Report being presented by Mal

Salter, Ruthanne Fuller, John D'Auria, Selina Pandolfi, Neil Silverston and Laura Thompsen. We hope you will join us as we discuss what is most important about our schools and how we can pay for them. We are pleased to welcome Paul Ash, the superintendent of Lexington Public Schools as our moderator. The forum will be at the Longyear Museum. Many cosponsors are joining us and they are posted on our web site. If your organization would like to join as a cosponsor, please let me know at president@lwnnewton.org. If you would like more information about the forums, please visit our web site at www.lwnnewton.org.

Come to Cash in the Trash 2

We are offering a second forum to continue the discussion about how the city's trial of automated trash pickup has gone and how "Pay As You Throw" (PAYT) trash pickup might work in Newton. Tom Daley, Scott Oran and Kevin Dutt will discuss our current trash pickup system and discuss why PAYT might be a good idea for Newton's budget as well as its environment. PAYT trash pickup was strongly recommended by the CAG in their Revenue report and is already successfully used in many Massachusetts cities and towns to promote recycling as well as save money. The forum will be at the Newton Free Library on April 7 from 7 to 9 pm.

How can we promote election by popular vote as the method for selecting the President?

If you are concerned about how the Electoral College works in presidential elections, bring your lunch to NewTV and discuss your views at the April 1 topic meeting from 11:30am to 1:30pm. The U.S. League of Women Voters is asking all Leagues to run a consensus meeting on the question of a new method to move the country from the Electoral College vote to popular vote in the U.S. presidential and vice presidential elections, since the Constitutional route has yet to be effected. For more information, visit our web site at www.lwnnewton.org.

Sincerely,

Terry Yoffie
President, Newton League of Women Voters

**LWVN's Municipal Finance Committee
presents a series of forums**

Critical Choices for Newton, 2009 and Beyond

***Discussing the Citizen Advisory Group
Findings and Recommendations***

School Cost Structure

Tuesday, March 24, 7-9 pm, Longyear Museum
1125 Boylston St., Chestnut Hill

Municipal Cost Structure

Monday, April 6, 7-9 pm, Longyear Museum
1125 Boylston St., Chestnut Hill

Capital Infrastructure

Monday, May 4, 7-9 pm
Newton Free Library, 330 Homer St.

Performance Management/ Renewing Newton

Wednesday, June 3, 7-9 pm
Newton Free Library, 330 Homer St.

Check NewTV's schedule for broadcast times of our forum on the **Revenue Report**, which was presented on February 26.

The LWVN is pleased to have the following co-sponsors for these events: The Newton Free Library, NewTV, the *Newton TAB*, Wicked Local Newton, the Green Decade Coalition, the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce, the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association, the Waban Improvement Society, the Chestnut Hill Association, the Newton Corner Neighborhood Association, the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council, Newton 20/20, Stand for Children Newton, the Newton Schools Foundation, and the Newton PTO Council.

Convention 2009: LWV Massachusetts

Health Care Rx: Challenges and Solutions for Our State and Nation

May 29-30, 2009
Boston Newton Marriott,
2345 Commonwealth Ave., Newton, MA

Featured Speakers:

Patricia A. Walrath
Former Representative for the Third Middlesex District

Nancy Turnbull
*Department for Health Policy and Management,
Harvard School of Public Health*

What do we do at Convention 2009?

- § Plan the Program for 2009 – 2011
- § Approve the Budget for 2009 – 2011
- § Elect LWVMA Officers to the Board
- § Participate in Interesting Workshops
- § Network with League Members from Across Massachusetts

For more information, contact the LWVMA office:
617-523-2999 or www.lwvma@lwvma.org.

LWV Concord-Carlisle House Tour

Our League is once again hosting a Spring House Tour, and we'd love to have your members join us on April 15 for a fun and educational day here in historic, beautiful Concord. Our 2009 House Tour is "Room for Us: Adapting Spaces to Your Needs."

Tickets are \$30 in advance, \$35 at the door, and all proceeds will support LWVCC's efforts to make democracy work in our communities. For further information, see www.lwvcc.com/house_tour.html.

National League Updates

Excerpts from recent LWV US Leaders' Update and LeaguE-Voice newsletters

Visit www.lwv.org and use the search tool to find more information on any of the topics below.

Women's History Month

We at the League of Women Voters honor our foremothers who fought for our rights – and made a difference for our mothers, sister, daughters, and friends. In celebration of Women's History Month 2009, the League of Women Voters not only commemorates the past, but looks toward the future of what our activism and efforts can achieve.

Sunshine Week

Sunshine Week, celebrated this year from March 15 -21, is a nationwide initiative to draw attention to the importance of open government and freedom of information. On March 20 the LWVEF co-hosted the *4th Annual Sunshine Week National Dialogue*, "Opening Doors: Finding the Keys to Open Government" in Washington, DC.

Global Climate Change Principles

The League, as part of a broad-based coalition of groups, on March 5 released principles for climate legislation that President Obama and Congress must heed in order to avoid the worst effects of global warming.

League Endorses Congressional Insider Trading Legislation

The League of Women Voters, along with coalition partners, endorsed the "Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge Act" in a letter to the bill's co-sponsors.

Join the League of Women Voters of Newton!

Membership in the LWVN offers the chance to gain knowledge and experience about vital issues in Newton at well as in Massachusetts and in the nation at large; to make a valuable contribution to your community; and to discover new interests, develop new skills, make new contacts and develop lasting friendships.

Membership is open to all citizens (men and women) of voting age. Associate membership is open to young people and noncitizens. Your annual dues give you membership in local, state and national leagues. You will receive regular publications from all three organizations, as well as a chance to be active, informed and heard.

Name(s)		Home Phone	
Address		Other Phone	
City/State/Zip		Email Address	

Please **CIRCLE** preferred method of contact: **Phone** / **Email**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual - \$55.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Household (2 members) - \$75.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Membership - \$75.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Membership - \$100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime Membership - \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Membership - \$25 |

Please return your completed form with your check, payable to LWVN (or pay online by credit card at lwvnewton.org/join.php). Membership dues and contributions to the LWV Newton are not deductible for tax purposes. Tax-deductible contributions to the LWV US Educational Fund may be made by check and sent to the LWVN Treasurer. Assistance is available if membership dues present a financial hardship. If you prefer, you can call us at 617-964-0014 or email info@lwvnewton.org to request a membership packet. **Please send checks to:** Andrea Kozinetz, LWVN Treasurer, 8 Stony Brae Road, Newton Highlands, MA 02461.

LWVN CALENDAR

MARCH

24th Tue., 7:00-9:00 pm, **Critical Choices for Newton: CAG School Cost Structure Report**, second of five forums. Longyear Museum, 1125 Boylston St. (Rt. 9), Chestnut Hill.

APRIL

1st Wed., 11:30am-1:30pm, **Topic Meeting: National Popular Vote Compact Consensus Study**, NewTV 23 Easy St., Newton Highlands

2nd Thu., 7:00 pm, **LWVN Board Meeting**, location to be announced.

6th Mon., 1:00-3:00 pm, **Election Commission Task Force Meeting**, Newton City Hall.

6th Mon., 7:00-9:00 pm, **Critical Choices for Newton: CAG Municipal Cost Structure Report**, third of five forums. Longyear Museum, 1125 Boylston St. (Rt. 9), Chestnut Hill.

7th Tue., 7:00-9:00 pm, **Cash in the Trash II**, Druker Auditorium, Newton Free Library.

8th Wed., 9:30am-12:00 pm, **Archive Morning**, First Baptist Church basement (contact Ann Grantham, 617-964-0333 for more details).

15th Wed., 9:30am-12:00pm, **Archive Morning** (above)

29th Wed., 9:30am-12:00pm, **Archive Morning** (above)

30th Thu., 7:00 pm, **LWVN Board Meeting**, location to be announced.

MAY

4th Mon., 7:00-9:00 pm, **Critical Choices for Newton: CAG Capital Infrastructure Report**, fourth of five forums. Newton Free Library.

7th Thu., 6:30-8:30 pm, **ANNUAL MEETING**, Senior Center, 345 Walnut St.

29-30th **LWV MA Convention**, Newton Marriott, 2345 Commonwealth Ave.

JUNE

3rd Wed., 7:00-9:00 pm, **Performance Management Report / "Renewing Newton,"** last of five forums. Newton Free Library.

à Don't forget to check our online calendar for any late-breaking changes! www.lwvnewton.org

League of Women Voters of Newton

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