
League of Women Voters of Newton

Newsletter

Volume 15, Issue 6

visit us online at www.lwvnewton.org

October 2009

Sidewalk Issue: Uncleared

In May, the League-coordinated committee of sidewalk snow clearing enthusiasts met with the three Aldermen who spent the greater part of 2008-09 studying city snow issues. Bill Brandel, Vicki Danberg and Scott Lennon outlined some of their findings, such as the incredible complexity of the city's current management of snow removal. Streets are plowed by city workers and a series of private contractors (who take care of side streets during heavy storms), and coordinating the standards for such clearing—including whether snow gets dumped on sidewalks and at curb cuts—is a challenge.

Two departments are responsible for clearing sidewalks: the DPW clears most, but the Parks and Recreation Department clears school blue zones and playgrounds. School custodians are responsible for the front stoops of their schools.

Asked about a residential snow clearing ordinance, which was tried nearly 20 years ago and revoked, the aldermen expressed concern about enforcement and about first making sure that the city was doing an adequate job.

Scott Lennon noted that their next step was to report out their findings. He is responsible for that, and expects to have something written up and approved by the other two aldermen in October.

Meanwhile, our committee has been working with DPW head Tom Daly and his lieutenant Dave Turocy to produce a flyer encouraging residents to clear sidewalks of ice and snow and explaining the requirement that businesses do so. Sean Roche has been hard at work with committee members on this, and has also promised to produce a snow website that the DPW can upload onto its website. This website would answer most of the frequently-asked-questions about residential and business area snow removal.

Our committee is looking forward to Ald. Lennon's report, and to taking sidewalk snow removal to the next level this winter.

Brown Bag it with the Mayoral Candidates!

If you've been itching to meet and talk with Newton's mayoral candidates in an informal setting, the LWVN's October Topic meeting is just the ticket: both have agreed to join us for our traditional brown-bag lunch meeting on October 14th, from 11:30am to 1:30 pm at NewTV.

Walking, Trash, Fees and More!

Following two successful forums on trash, recycling and pay-as-you-throw, the Environmental Committee took direction from May's Annual Meeting to examine the environmental aspects of transportation and mobility in Newton.

In an attempt to come up to speed on this issue, the committee invited Sean Roche of Newton Streets & Sidewalks and Lois Levin of Bike Newton to talk with us over the summer. From that meeting, it became clear that the issue was far too complex to be digested in one year or one forum!

At our Sept. 18 meeting, we debated how to get a handle on this, and decided that one way to focus might be to take a page from the Safe Routes to School folks and see if we could promote additional Safe Routes to Walk in Newton. A suggested starting point could be the categorization of routes by their safety and by how many people need to use them to get to essential services (transit, village centers and, of course, schools).

The committee's next meeting will educate us further about this issue, when David Koses and Candace Havens, who work or have worked in transportation planning for the city, join us Oct. 16, 9:30 am at Lu-

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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. Regular 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.

For more information about the League of Women Voters, including information on joining us, call 617-964-0014 or visit www.lwvnewton.org.

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Thanks! Another Successful Mayoral Forum

On Thursday, October 1, the LWVN hosted a forum between the two final candidates in the mayoral race, Ruth Balser and Setti Warren. The forum, held at Lasell College's DeWitt Hall, was extremely well attended and well received.

Many thanks go to moderator Nancy Carapezza, of the League of Women Voters of Wayland, and LWVN members Tami Roberts, Pat Acton, Andrea Downs, Gail Glick, Ingrid Kefauver, Shirley Farnham, Lee Kefauver, Carol Ann Shea, and especially the Voter Service Coordinators, Sharyn Roberts, Barbara Sydney and Bonnie Carter.

Special Guests to attend next Environmental Issues meeting

David Koses, Newton Transportation Plan Coordinator and Candice Havens, Newton's former Transportation Plan Coordinator, will both be at the next LWVN Environmental Issues meeting, October 16 at 9:30 am, to discuss transportation in Newton. The meeting will be at Lucia Dolan's house.

From the President

October 2009

Dear League Members,

The 2009 election effort continues and the City Charter Study has begun.

Election Activities

The Preliminary Election is over and many thanks to all who voted and participated in working at the polls. Many League members work as poll workers and/or as wardens and we are proud that they have committed themselves to assuring that the city's elections run well. Many of our members have also dedicated themselves to work with the Election department improving how the polls are managed. They have formed a working group with the Election department to identify and implement improvements that can be made to our elections process. If you are interested in becoming involved with this working group, please contact its chairs, Ellen Glusman and Nancy Criscitiello.

I would like to congratulate Ruth Balsler and Setti Warren for succeeding in the preliminary election for mayor and Margie Ross Decter and Tom Mountain for Ward 8 School Committee. They will be on the November ballot along with 41 other candidates for ward aldermen, aldermen at large, and School Committee. Besides the mayoral contest, there are contests for ward alderman in Wards 5 and 6, for alderman at large in Wards 1, 5 and 7 and for School Committee in Wards 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. I also want to thank the candidates who worked so hard on the mayoral and Ward 8 school committee races who will not be in the November election. I want to wish Paul Colletti, Bill Heck, Ken Parker, Linda Green, and Tom White best wishes and congratulations on raising awareness and the stimulating conversations about what it takes to run the city and the school system. Your efforts made this preliminary election season exciting and thoughtful. We look forward to seeing you in the future in Newton politics. For information about the election and who is running, see www.lwvnewton.org.

The League's Voters Service committee has scheduled many debates for the November 3 election, offering twelve debates between October 1 and October 18. Visit our web site to view times, locations and details. In addition, Voters Service will be publishing a Voters' Guide for Candidates with the Newton TAB in the latter part of October. Watch your TAB for a printed copy, or visit us online to read it there! We owe many

thanks to Village Bank and Lasell College who generously funded the printing costs. We deeply appreciate their commitment to the city and voter education.

October Topic Meeting

The League will welcome Ruth Balsler and Setti Warren for an informal discussion over lunch on October 14 from 11:30am – 1:30pm. Come and meet the candidates and bring a brown bag lunch. We will be at NewTV 23 Easy St.

The City Charter Study

Sandy Butzel and Rhanna Kidwell, co-chairs of the City Charter Study, held a meeting on September 24 to kick off the League's effort. They have charged participants to examine how the City's charter, ordinances, and Rules of Aldermen specify who has authority in governing Newton's resources, including the operating and capital budgets, administrative departments, and land (via zoning, land use decisions, and historic preservation). In addition, sub-groups will examine the electoral process (including term lengths, term limits, at-large vs. district representation, etc.), the role of the Executive Office, and the role of the Legislature and School Committee.

Study sub-groups will document the current state of their subject matter by exploring the charter, ordinances, and rules, and through interviews. They will then compare our structure to charters of "role model" cities and a professionally developed model charter published by the National Civic League. They will then evaluate whether our current structure is effective and identify possible improvements.

The co-chairs plan to use the League email system and newsletters to present several Content Papers which

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Welcome New Members!

Alicia Bowman, 19 Chestnut Terr.

Guive Mirfendereski, 24 Carleton St.

Joan Portnoy, 35 Helene Rd.

Wendy Schapiro, 99 Needham St., Apt 1113

Emily Shumsky, 36 Hilltop St.

Walking, etc: continued from page 1

cia Dolan's house. Future meetings will continue these discussions, and we plan to hold an interactive forum with the many city groups interested in walking in the spring.

Another issue which the Board has asked us to coordinate with the Municipal Finance committee is on the issue of User Fees. Environmental became interested in pay-as-you-throw as a way to radically increase recycling at about the same time the CAG independently issued recommendations for user fees for trash, school lunches, and more. After the November elections, we will be meeting with members of Municipal Finance to plan a forum or panel discussion for the public. Among the aspects of user fees we discussed possibly exploring how the city could provide relief for low income residents, whether a fee would advance a city or League goal by discouraging use (as in the case of water or trash fees), and how to set the fee to maximize yield.

The committee will also be presenting a single, member-only concurrence meeting on user fees. The state League already has a position supporting them. Our options are to concur with the position or not work on it. The state League program on the web says it supports "user fees" without any elaboration. We are researching this issue further and should have an article in the Newsletter before a spring concurrence meeting.

All members are welcome to join this committee at any of our meetings.

After Oct. 16, the plan is to meet Nov. 20, and Dec. 18. All are at 9:30 a.m. at Lucia Dolan's home.

What's in a Name: Election Commission? Election Department?

The LWVN formed the Election Commission task force to study the election process in Newton. One particular goal is to better understand the relationship between the Election Commission, a board of four people that is appointed by the Mayor, and the city election department, which is also called the Election Commission. The two are separate bodies with different areas of responsibility, but, not surprisingly, their functions and roles can be difficult to sort out.

The city department runs the day to day operations of the election process: it makes nomination papers available and verifies the signatures candidates collect; manages the logistics of election day, hiring wardens and poll workers; runs the city census; collects campaign finance reports; and performs the other tasks that are necessary to keeping elections lawful and ensuring they run smoothly. The four-person Board of Commissioners, on the other hand, plays a less hands-on role: it certifies the final results as reported by the election department and sets general policy.

The head of the city department is Craig Manseau. However, instead being called *Commissioner* of the Election Department (as, say, the heads of the Parks and Rec or Public Works departments are known), he is called the Executive Secretary to the Election Commission, since technically he and the whole election department work under the umbrella of the mayorally-appointed Board of Commissioners. In practice, however, the Executive Secretary is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the mayor – just like the four Commissioners.

President's letter, continued from page 3

members can enjoy and use in the final consensus meeting, which is scheduled for April 7 from 11:30am – 1:30pm and again in the evening from 7 to 9pm. The committee co-chairs have collected many resources and developed an electronic bibliography for use by committee members. Plus, the Library has ordered fifteen copies of The Model City Charter to be on hand for members. If you are interested in participating in the study, please call Sandy Butzel at 617-332-8021 or Rhanna Kidwell at 617-244-3832.

Other Opportunities to get involved:

Visit our web site to learn about what we do, send an email to me at president@lwnnewton.org about your interests or call the League phone 617-964-0014 and we will contact you. We have many exciting projects that need volunteers and we are always happy to work with volunteers on the interests they would like to pursue.

Finally, if there are topics you would like us to cover, please let me know by email or phone.

Respectfully,

Terry Yoffie

President, League of Women Voters Newton

LWV MA: Report – Joint Committee on Education

**Prepared by: Terry Yoffie, Education Specialist
League of Women Voters, Massachusetts**

Date: September 25, 2009

RE: H4163 and H4164

Two important hearings occurred this month at the Joint Committee on Education. The first hearing was on September 8 and Education Secretary Paul Reville presented his annual report on Education. The second hearing before the Education Committee was on the Governor's Charter Schools (H4163) and Readiness Schools (H4164) bills. Both hearings were well attended with the second attended by hundreds of people including many charter school students, parents and teachers (all wearing powder blue t-shirts).

Secretary Reville testified at length at both hearings. At the first hearing, Secretary Reville laid out the overriding principles driving the Governor's strategy on education, summarized their accomplishments to date and presented the goals chosen for 2009-2010. If you it www.mass.gov/?pageID=eoutilities&L=1&sid=Eoe&U=Feature_Education_Reform_More you will be able to read through the presentation made and the bills that the Patrick administration is promoting this fall.

At the second hearing, Reville answered the Joint Committee on Education's questions. With regard to the Charter Bill cap legislation (H4163), he answered that the state must lift its charter school cap in order to access federal RTTT (Race To The Top) Funds as one of the reasons to support the charter bill. Education Committee members asked some thoughtful questions. Chairs Representative Marty Walz and Senator Robert O'Leary were well prepared and ran the hearings efficiently. My take on the committee's response and questioning of Reville was that it is being very conservative in accepting what the administration is promoting. This is especially true because what the administration is promoting is quite revolutionary. What it is recommending within the Readiness Bill includes bending the rules on union contracts and extending the length of school days, and within the Charter Bill it raises the cap on charter funding. Although it is unclear if the legislators will support 100% of the Governor's bills, it is likely that they will approve some elements of each bill. There seems to be much interest on Beacon Hill in changing the way underperforming schools are handled. One interesting point that I keep hearing Reville repeat (I have heard him say this in the last three public meetings I have seen him at) is that the

focus of the administration's bills is on achievement and servicing kids over serving the other interests involved in education.

Where is the League on the two bills presented by Secretary Reville? The Readiness Bill was presented to the Program and Action committee in August and the committee recommended that the board approve taking action on it. However, when it was presented to the board, it failed due to its conflict with the state League's position on home rule. This is especially the case when and if the state decides to intervene with an underperforming or chronically underperforming school, circumventing the school district and school committee in charge of the troubled school.

Various interests testified at the hearing on September 17. In most cases I was not surprised with the positions individuals and groups took. The business community was supportive of charter schools. Chris Andersen, former Chair of the Board of Education and President of the High Tech Council testified that the MA High Tech Council has voted to help fund the initiative petition (ballot question) which hopes to expand the number of charter schools in Massachusetts and remove some of the requirements of the approval process, making it easier to open a charter school.

Paul Grogan of the Boston Foundation made an articulate presentation in favor of more charter schools. Parents and children testifying promoted the idea of charter schools so that they could move their children out of failing schools.

Representatives of the Superintendents offered a balanced position which stated that they were not happy about the bills but if the legislature would assure that they could obtain more time and resources for vulnerable kids, they would be happy.

Anne Wass, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, and the representative from the American Federation of Teachers were opposed to the bills.

Stand for Children testified that it favored the Charter bill while Citizens for Public Schools opposed it. Citizens for Public Schools also took the opportunity to appeal to the Committee to use the opportunity with these bills to reform the MCAS test for graduation and create other assessment tools to determine students' progress in mastering the curriculum.

LWVN CALENDAR

OCTOBER

- 1st Thurs., 7:00pm Mayoral Debate
- 13th Tues., 4:00pm, Alderman-at-Large Debates,
NewTV Studio, 23 Needham St
- 14th Wed., 11:30am-1:30pm, LWVN Topic Meeting, at
NewTV: **Meet the Mayoral Candidates**
- 16th Fri., 9:30am, LWVN Environmental Issues
Committee Meeting, 9:30am - 11:30am - Lucia
Dolan's house
- 18th Sun., 12:30pm, School Committee Debates,
NewTV Studio, 23 Needham St
- 19th Mon., 6:00pm Ward Alderman/School Commit-
tee Debates, NewTV Studio, 23 Needham St
- 21st Wed., 4:30pm, LWVN Working Board/Program
& Action Meeting, Location TBA

- 27th Tues., 7:00pm, LWVN Board Meeting, Anne
Borg's house.
- 28th LWVN CPC Readers' Committee Meeting, 2pm
- 4pm, AnnaMaria Abernathy's house.

NOVEMBER

- 3rd Tues, 7am - 8pm, **Municipal Election**
- 18th Wed., 11:30am-1:30pm, LWVN Topic Meeting,
at NewTV. *NOTE CHANGED DATE!*
4:30pm, LWVN Working Board/Program &
Action Meeting, Location TBA
- 20th Fri., 9:30am, LWVN Environmental Issues
Committee Meeting, 9:30am - 11:30am - Lucia
Dolan's house
- 24th Tues., 7:00pm, LWVN Board Meeting, Location
TBA.

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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