
League of Women Voters of Newton

Newsletter

Volume 16, Issue 6

visit us online at www.lwvnewton.org

October 2010

The League of Women Voters Urges a NO Vote on Question 2

By Leslie Burg

Question 2 on the Massachusetts ballot this November 2 would repeal the state's primary affordable housing law. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges you to vote "NO" on 2 to protect the affordable housing law for our seniors and working families.

This law is about fairness and equity. All families should have a choice about where to live. The affordable housing law sets a reasonable goal for each and every city and town to require at least 10% of its homes to be affordable. It encourages construction of new homes by allowing for a single comprehensive permit and flexible zoning for developers who build affordable homes.

Here are some facts about the law in the context of Massachusetts:

- Over the last decade, **this law has been responsible for approximately 80% of the affordable homes** built outside of the Commonwealth's major cities.
- **More than 58,000 homes have been created** for working families, seniors, and disabled individuals across the state.
- **A repeal of the current law would immediately halt the construction of 12,000 homes** in the pipeline, and all of the jobs and economic benefits they would bring.

In Newton, since 1997, 95% of all housing units that were counted toward the required 10% threshold, excepting group homes and other specialized housing, have used the 40B comprehensive permit process. Since 1973, a total of 1,186 units added to the subsidized housing inventory are directly attributable to 40B.

Most importantly, the affordable housing law enables communities like ours to create housing for their local residents. Seniors on fixed incomes have too few housing

options when looking to downsize. Young people entering the workforce who want to live where they were raised often cannot find places to rent or buy in their own community. Municipal workers are often forced to commute long distances because of the high cost of housing. The affordable housing law helps expand housing opportunities for these important populations, and allows a 70 percent local preference to make sure many of the homes are available for local residents.

Through the use of the affordable housing law, Newton has provided housing for working families and seniors living on modest incomes. Making it possible for those who work in the city to live here—our teachers, police officers, firefighters, and social workers among them--helps to maintain an inviting and vibrant community while supporting diversity, a long-held Newton value.

The *Vote No on 2 Campaign* has come together to ensure the law is not repealed. We are a grassroots coalition of more than 350 organizations, including the League of Women Voters, and thousands of individuals committed to protecting this law. Our coalition includes civic, business, religious, and academic leaders as well as senior, environmental, housing, and civil rights groups. All three major candidates for governor agree we should all vote "No" to support this law.

For more info or to get involved, go to www.protectaffordablehousing.org, call 617-933-5275 or email info@protectaffordablehousing.org.

Locally, you may contact Leslie Burg, laburg@rcn.com or Carol Ann Shea, milo44@verizon.net, co-chairs of the LWVN Housing Committee.

And remember in November, Vote "NO on 2" to protect the affordable housing law.

Please join LWVN at the October 13 Topic Meeting for a discussion with Phil Herr and Josephine McNeil about the affordable housing law.

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To receive an **audio version** of this Newsletter, call Anne Borg at 617-244-6366.

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 617-383-4598 or visit www.lwvnewton.org.

**Don't forget to
send in your
2010-2011 LWVN
Membership
Renewal!**

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Candidates' Forums

Sunday, October 17, 2:00-8:30pm

Lasell College deWitt Hall, Winslow Academic Center
80 Maple St, Auburndale

Doors open at 1:45pm; come early to submit written questions for the candidates.

2:00 pm - Attorney General

3:00 pm - Secretary of the Commonwealth

4:00 pm - Rep. 10th District Middlesex

5:00 pm - U.S. Congress, 4th District

6:00 pm - State Auditor

7:30 pm - State Treasurer

Please check www.lwvnewton.org for the most up-to-date information.

Sponsored by LWVN and LWVMA.

We still need volunteers for this forum - question sorters, greeters, ushers, etc - please email: voterservice@lwvnewton.org

Letter from the Leadership

October, 2010

Awesome Autumn Start!

Now that summer is over, the LWV of Newton has kicked off a very busy season of public forums in addition to our various committees resuming works in progress or gearing up for new projects.

The Environmental Issues Water Resources Subcommittee held a hugely successful first forum at the Newton Free Library on September 21. The video of the evening is now running on NewTV. The second forum in this series - Stormwater Management II: Do We Need an Ark? - will be held on Tuesday, October 26, 7 PM at the Newton Free Library. Don't miss it!

We sponsored a candidates' forum at NewTV on Sunday, October 3, at 7 PM for the office of Governor's Council 3rd District. Please check the LWVN website for updates on candidates' forums to be held on Sunday, October 17, at Lasell College, and don't forget to vote on November 2.

Our Housing Committee has planned an informative Topic Meeting with speakers Phil Herr and Josephine McNeil about affordable housing, and why we should

"Vote No on 2." Come join us on Wednesday, October 13, from 11:30am-1:30pm at the NewTV Conference Room, 23 Needham St. Don't forget to bring a brown bag lunch!

The Land Use Positions Review Committee is back in meeting mode, on track for a Spring 2011 presentation. If you are interested in participating on this committee, please contact Andrea Kelley.

Our 75th Anniversary year is launching - and the membership renewal forms offer the option of selecting a special 75th Anniversary membership option.

Everyone should have received the 2010 handbook by now...there are lots of activities, lots of programs, lots of opportunities to participate. Remember - democracy is not a spectator sport!

Looking forward to a great fall,

The Leadership Team
Gail, Anne, Bonnie, Ellen

VOTE "NO" ON 2 **Protect the Affordable Housing Law (40B)**

Thursday, October, 14, 2010
7:00 - 9:00 PM

Warren House, 1600 Washington St., West Newton

- Background on 40B and housing in Newton
- How it works -- Why we need it -- Why repealing it is a bad idea!
- Questions and discussion

Sponsor: Uniting Citizens for Housing Affordability in Newton (U-CHAN)

Co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters Newton

Questions? Contact uchan.newton@gmail.com

Refreshments will be provided.

Forum Roundup: Stormwater Management

by the Environmental Issues Water Resources Subcommittee

What caused the floods of March 2010? Was it inadequate storm drain capacity? Building on swamps? Too much pavement?

All of the above—and more, said the three panelists at the Sept. 21 forum organized by the League and co-sponsored by the Newton Free Library, Green Decade, Newton Conservators and Newton History Museum.

Among the additional reasons:

- Massachusetts got 21 inches of rain over 30 days. In an average year, the state gets about 45 inches a year. Since 1948, according to Charles River Watershed Association Executive Director Bob Zimmerman, the northeast has been getting unusually heavy spring rains followed by dry summers. He predicts this pattern will worsen.
- Until wetlands laws went into effect in the 1970s, Newton filled swamps and put streams into culverts. So when a lot of rain falls, the city has no natural “sponge” to soak it up.
- The city has deferred reinvestment in its stormwater drains and sewer pipes, as limited tax dollars have been used for more visible needs.

To add insult to injury last spring, many homeowners saw sewage overflow into their flooded basements and yards.

This, the panelists explained, happened because our crumbling wastewater pipes—many up to 150 years old, lined with brick, or made of clay—leak. In dry months, most residents won’t notice this, since the leaks mean that

ground water and stormwater leak into the sewer pipes, not the other way around. But when ground water and stormwater increase—as in a heavy storm—the leaks work the other way, and surcharged wastewater pipes overflow, gushing out of manholes, into basements, pouring with the rest of the drainage into the Charles.

Maria Rose, Environmental Engineer and Stormwater Program Manager for the City of Newton, explained the extent of Newton’s attempts to drain land for development from the 1890s to the 1970s. She showed both where the lowlands were and where the flooding was worst. She also noted that most of the wastewater Newton pays the MWRA to treat is drainage that leaks into the sewers.

This combination of stormwater and ground water is called inflow and infiltration, or I/I for short. Inflow results from roof drains and sump pumps connecting directly to the sanitary sewer system. Rose explained that such hookups are illegal. The city is inspecting for these “cross connections” while installing the new water meters.

Infiltration is the ground water that leaks into the sanitary sewers from cracks and underdrains. Most I/I is infiltration and it is fairly continuous, increasing during wet weather.

Fred Abernathy, professor of engineering at Harvard, conducted a study of Newton’s sewer problems with his students in 1999. They developed an ingenious way to detect how inflow was entering the sewers. He showed that illegal downspouts in one older neighborhood on the north side of town contributed an immediate and short-lived gush of rainwater to the system.

Continued on page 5

LWVN Topic Meeting

Why We Should Vote No on Ballot Question 2 and Save Affordable Housing

Wednesday, October 13, 2010

11:30am - 1:30pm

NewTV Conference Room, 23 Needham St

Speakers: Phil Herr and Josephine McNeil

Brown bag lunch - light refreshments only

OBSERVERS: THE EYES AND EARS OF THE LEAGUE

by Andrea Kelley and Lucia Dolan

Effective League activity in a community relies on an understanding of how local government works. A League Observer is the eyes and ears of the League, learning how government works and about issues that are, or may become, items for local study and action. Consistent League presence at these meetings also adds to the League's visibility and credibility.

The Open Meeting Law ensures "the right of all citizens to have advance notice of and to attend all meeting of public bodies at which any business affecting the public is discussed or acted upon, with certain limited exceptions to protect the public interest and preserve personal privacy." Consistent with this purpose, the general requirement of the law is that "all meetings of public bodies shall be open to the public at all times."

As an Observer, you are exercising that recognized right to be present at any public meeting.

OBJECTIVES: To monitor governmental bodies for information of importance to the League and the community/state.

Functions/Advantages of the Observer Corps:

- Enables greater coverage, information gathering
- Can provide early warning of upcoming issues of concern
- Trains future leaders
- Increases the League's visibility
- Assists with networking with other groups

Responsibilities of Observers:

1. Awareness of LWV positions and areas of concern
2. Attend assigned meetings, arriving promptly
3. Take notes/fill out observer report form
4. Report to the board
5. Advise the board of opportunities for action based on League positions

There are currently several Observers in place, but we could use more for other boards and commissions, and to share or alternate with current assignments. A complete list of boards, committees, and commissions with more information is available on our website: www.lwvnewton.org. We can also mail you a written copy.

The Newton League provides training, both written guidelines and expectations, as well as hands-on help such as teaming up with an experienced Observer to attend meetings.

This can be an easy way to learn more about something you are interested in, use your professional expertise in a volunteer and flexible way, and see City government in action.

Contact the LWVN Leadership Team if you have any interest or questions.

Stormwater. continued from page 4

On the south side of the city, much of the I/I is coming from sump pumps connected illegally to the sewer, which adds flow suddenly, but over a longer period of time.

The result of both illegal connections is sewage overflows that continue to plague the city in places near the Charles, like Lyons Field in Auburndale and Quinobequin Road in Waban.

Rose briefly described Newton's stormwater utility: the flat stormwater fees which pay for maintaining the storm drainage system--which is separate from our sanitary sewers. Cleaning of storm drains and catch basins is required by Newton's stormwater permit with the EPA. Zimmerman explained that phosphates in the runoff are the biggest source of pollution in the Charles. (They cause eutrophication and toxic algal blooms.) Phosphorus is precipitated out of automobile exhaust and washed down our streets, parking lots and driveways into the river.

Zimmerman said that climate change would probably increase the number of extreme rain events, as well as droughts, and suggested that homeowners consider installing cisterns and other water-storage devices to allow irrigation of their lawns and gardens during the summer dry spells. "We need to de-centralize water supply and drainage, and begin to mimic nature," he said.

No one mentioned the fact that when Newton fixes its sewer leaks, there will be more stormwater and greater flooding in low-lying areas.

What to do in the future about floods and pollution from stormwater will be discussed at the League's next forum entitled "Do We Need an Ark?" to be held at Newton Free Library, 7 pm, October 26.

LWVN CALENDAR

OCTOBER

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|------------------|--|------------------|---|
| 13 th | Wed., 11:30am, LWVN Topic Meeting | 17 th | Sun., 1:30-8:30pm, Candidates' Forums , deWitt Hall, Lasell College, 80 Maple St, Auburndale |
| 13 th | Wed., 3:30-5pm, Land Use Positions Review Committee , Andrea Kelley's house. | 26 th | Tues., 7:00pm, LWVN Forum - Storm Water Management: Part Two , Newton Free Library |
| 13 th | Wed., 7:30pm, Water Subcommittee meeting , Mary Adelstein's house | 27 th | Wed., 7:30pm, Education Committee meeting , Gail Glick's house |
| 14 th | Thurs., 7:00pm, U-CHAN Forum, "Vote No on 2" Warren House, 1600 Washington St | | |
| 15 th | Fri., 9:00am, Environmental Issues Committee meeting , Lucia Dolan's house | | |

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

Keep up with the workings of the Board of Aldermen!

Read the *LWVN Docket Digest*, available each week at www.lwvnewton.org.

League of Women Voters of Newton

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WHAT'S INSIDE

LWV Urges a NO Vote on Question 2.....	1
Candidates Forums	2
Letter from Leadership.....	3
Forum Roundup: Stormwater Management	4
Observers: the Eyes and Ears of the League	5