
League of Women Voters of Newton

Newsletter

Volume 16, Issue 7

visit us online at www.lwvnewton.org

November 2010

Mayor's Mixed Use Task Force Update

by Andrea Kelley, chair, LWVM Land Use Positions Review Committee and member, Mayor's Mixed Use Task Force

Mayor Setti Warren appointed a 20-member task force to review the process and policies for large scale, mixed use development in Newton. The Mixed Use Task Force (MUTF) met throughout the summer, starting June 3, 2010.

Phil Herr chaired the MUTF, which met regularly as an entire committee, and in smaller subgroups based on topics: Process, Access, Design, Housing, Finance and Outreach. They also held a community-wide meeting on July 29 to gather input and comments from the public.

At the final meeting on Sept. 30, it was agreed that its goal has been met. The result is a draft amendment to Newton's Comprehensive Plan. In addition, a draft of sample changes to the Newton Zoning Ordinance, in which MUTF supports a modified Planned, Multi-Use Business Development (PMBD) zone, is being finalized. A third document drafts an optional "Collaborative Impact Assessment" process, which dovetails to the draft zoning.

A main point that arose is that the process by which large developments can be built needs to have clear and regularized community involvement so that citizens, the Board of Aldermen, and City staff can have their input earlier in the development process, before the developer is fully invested in a particular plan or approach.

Developing a way to measure the impacts of new development on the community and Newton as a whole was also explored. Metrics could be established with cooperation of the community and City staff, early in the development process so that changes can be made before a predetermined vision becomes set. This process is outlined in the "Collaborative Impact Assessment" memo.

Minimum gross square footage of developments that will come under the new Amendment and modified PMBD is recommended to be 200,000 square feet.

There was discussion at the final meeting about the definition of "beneficial open space". This term generally applies to outdoor places where people can congregate and recreate, including rooftop green spaces. Whether grassy buffers, screening borders, parking lot islands, interior courtyards or community meeting rooms should be included was debated. There was a preference voiced that programmed open spaces with connections and adjacencies be considered, and it was recommended that City staff further refine Newton's open space categories.

Mayor Warren reviewed the draft Amendment and accompanying memos in late October. He endorsed the work of the committee and supports the resulting documents.

The Amendment to Newton's Comprehensive Plan now goes before the Board of Aldermen, where it will first be referred to the Planning and Development Board. At that stage, a public workshop will be planned. Following review by the P&D Board, the document(s) will be reviewed by the Board of Aldermen (BOA), most likely by the Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP). A public hearing is mandated for that stage. Once ZAP makes its recommendation, it will go before the full BOA for a vote.

It is realistic to expect that this approval process can be completed during the current calendar year. Large scale, mixed use developments such as Riverside* will then need to follow the new recommendations and policies.

The documents can be found at:
http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/cdbg/mixed_use_tf/mixed_use.htm.

** Unfortunately, too late to apply to the Chestnut Hill Square project.*

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2010-2011**

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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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LWVN November Topic Meeting

**Crystal Lake:
The Impact of an Urban Environment on a
Natural Lake; Preliminary Analysis and
Possible Solutions**

Wednesday, November 10, 2010

11:30am - 1:30pm

NewTV Conference Room, 23 Needham St

The Crystal Lake Conservancy, dedicated to preserving Crystal Lake for the benefit of the public, has undertaken a continuing scientifically-based environmental study of the lake and its surrounding watershed. Janice Bourque and Schuyler Larrabee, co-presidents, will discuss the preliminary results of the study, some of which run counter to popular assumptions about the lake's health. Then, they will outline steps that may be taken by residents of the lake's watershed, and by the city, to mitigate the harm that an urban environment can cause. What we are learning in the microcosm of studying Crystal Lake has widespread application to the broader environment of Newton.

Letter from the Leadership

November, 2010

Voters Service

This has been a busy election season, and the League's Voters Service Committee has been busy, too! We produced a Voters Guide for the September primary election that was published on the *Newton TAB's* website, as well as our own website. We held a debate on October 3 for the Governor's Council, 3rd District candidates, and on October 17, LWVN held a marathon of debates for both local and state-wide races.

We would like to thank the following LWVN members who helped at the debates: Mary Adelstein, Anne Borg, Doug Borg, Bonnie Carter, Lucia Dolan, Ruthanne Fuller, Gail Glick, Ellen Glusman, Linda Greenberg, Andrea Kelley, Alison Leary, Steve Linsky, Tami Roberts, Carol Ann Shea, Barbara Sydney. Thank you also to Jean Childs (LWV Wellesley), Georgie Hallock (LWV Waltham), and Joan Savitt (LWV Wellesley), and especially to our moderators: Deborah Brown (LWV Lexington), Risa Nyman (LWV Brookline), and Karen Price (LWV Needham).

Thank you to our very generous and supportive co-sponsors: NewTV, Lasell College, LWV Massachusetts, LWV Belmont, LWV Waltham, LWV Watertown, LWV Wellesley, and LWV Weston.

A huge and special thank you goes to Sharyn Roberts, Voters Service chair. She worked tirelessly to coordinate the venues and candidates.

Environmental Committee

Thank you very much also to the Water Subcommittee of LWVN's Environmental Committee. Priscilla Leith, Chair; Mary Adelstein, Vice Chair; and their committee presented two forums about stormwater management that were both informative and very interesting. We know that all attendees learned a lot; please see the forum wrap-up in this newsletter.

Members of the LWVN Environmental Committee have also been very busy working with other organizations on a sidewalk snow removal ordinance. The ordinance will be presented to the Board of Aldermen at their November 15 regular meeting. We need to show the Aldermen our support for this ordinance; please attend the upcoming public hearing! The public hearing will be held on Wednesday, November 17, at 7:00pm, in the Aldermanic Chamber at City Hall. Members of the public will be able to speak (2 minute limit).

Housing Committee

LWVN Housing Committee Co-chairs Leslie Burg and Carol Ann Shea worked very hard this fall to help defeat Ballot Question 2 and maintain the Affordable Housing Law.

Health Care Committee?

Several LWVN members are looking into re-forming a LWVN Health Care Committee. If you are interested participating, or just finding out more, please email us at info@lwvnewton.org.

November Topic Meeting

We hope that you can join us on Wednesday, November 10, for the next Topic Meeting. We are pleased that the Crystal Lake Conservancy will make a presentation about the impact of Newton's urban environment on Crystal Lake. The meeting will be at NewTV, 23 Needham St, from 11:30am-1:30pm. Brown bag lunches are welcome!

SAVE THE DATE!! The League will hold its Annual Holiday Party on Sunday, December 12, from 5:30-8:00pm. More information to come!

In League,

Gail, Ellen, Bonnie, and Anne
LWVN Leadership Team

CPA Readers Committee Needs You!

Join the fun! Our committee of CPA proposal readers is reassembling, and new readers are welcome. All newbies will be paired with a more experienced member. Your experience, thoughts and comments are wanted! Email: info@lwvnewton.org.

Snow Group Plows Ahead

The League's Environmental Issues Committee, working in coalition with other city organizations as Newton Safe Sidewalks, is starting to see the fruits of its year-long efforts on winter safety.

This fall, Mayor Setti Warren made a major commitment to ensure winter pedestrian safety in Newton—for details, see the League of Women Voters of Newton's letter to the mayor on our website: www.lwvnewton.org.

In the meantime, the League and Safe Sidewalks have been busy. We are sending notices out to affiliated groups, and are preparing support for a residential sidewalk snow ordinance that will be presented to the Board of Aldermen on Monday, November 15 at 7pm, followed by a public hearing on Wednesday, November 17 at 7pm. Your presence at one or both will help advance the proposed ordinance! If you cannot attend, you may send comments to the aldermen via City Clerk, David Olson at dolson@newtonma.gov.

The Safe Sidewalks flyer on winter safety was handed out at the Farmer's Market, and at League events, and can be downloaded from our website at www.lwvnewton.org. We also helped to write, design and plan a flyer that will be in every water bill this fall and winter, encouraging residents to pitch in and dig out.

The effort would not be successful without the efforts of Ald. Vicki Danberg, who is the lead sponsor of the sidewalk clearing ordinance, and of our partners in Green Decade, Bike Newton, the Bike & Pedestrian Task Force, the PTO Council/Safe Routes to School, and many more!

To get involved, please contact newtonsidewalks@gmail.com.

Support Safe Sidewalks Year Round

Come show your support for safe, clear sidewalks year round. The proposed sidewalk snow removal ordinance will be presented to the full Board of Aldermen Monday, November 15, at 7 pm. The Public Hearing will be held on Wednesday, November 17, at 7:00pm, in the Aldermanic Chamber. Come voice your support!! If you can't come to the meeting, please send a letter of support to the Board via dolson@newtonma.gov. More information will be posted on the LWVN website (www.lwvnewton.org) or please email: newtonsidewalks@gmail.com.

NewTV Holds 3rd Annual Auction

The Newton League of Women Voter is 75 years old. NewTV is only 18 years old. But during all of those years, NewTV has been a tremendous help to the League in



fulfilling its mission of informing voters. NewTV co-sponsors candidate debates with the League because we do not endorse candidates. This means that they provide the staff and facilities for television production and playback on the channels. NewTV came up with the idea of the "Legislative Roundtable" and asked the League to provide the host for the show. This provides an opportunity for the legislators and the League to discuss legislative issues in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

NewTV is a PEG access facility. PEG stands for Public, Educational, and Governmental -- those are the three channels that NewTV operates. NewTV is also a membership organization. You can join NewTV as an individual, family, non-profit organization, or a business. As a member, you can take courses in video production, and use the production equipment and facilities to produce a show for NewTV. All of the programming on the Public (Blue) Channel is produced by volunteers who are also members. (Some programming is produced elsewhere and sponsored by members.) The League of Women Voters of Newton is an organizational member of NewTV. We can learn video production and we can support NewTV by supporting the Live Fall Auction.

NewTV will hold its third annual live fall auction from 6:00 to 10:00 pm on November 15, 16, and 17. You can support NewTV by tuning in and bidding and /or volunteering to answer phones during the auction. If you can volunteer, please call Cheryl at 617-965-7500, ext. 114. You can visit NewTV at www.newtv.org.

Stormwater Forum II: Roundup

By the Water Subcommittee of the Environmental Issues Committee

Flooding and the future in Newton were addressed from three diverse perspectives at the October 26 forum sponsored by the LWVN, Historic Newton, Green Decade/Newton, Newton Conservators and the Newton Free Library.

Extreme weather events seem to be on the increase, hydrology professor Ellen Douglas said, showing data from her study of storms hitting the Northeast.

Unfortunately, funds to address even current water and sewer needs in Newton may not be adequate, said Bob Rooney, the City's Chief Operating Officer.

Nonetheless, new tools are being developed to reclaim stormwater as a resource instead of viewing it as a problem, according to Martin Pillsbury, environmental division manager of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

Douglas opened the discussion with the results of her research, showing that since 1900, average temperatures are higher in the summer by 2 percent and in the winter by 4 percent—meaning a longer gardening season, but also more frequent extreme heat days. More storms bringing more rain are happening along the New England coast as measured since 1970, and more of them are multi-day events. Newton's infrastructure, like much in the area, is designed to handle a single bad day of rain, not the multi-day events we got in March.

"We need to engineer for these," Douglas said. The challenge, she said, will be designing for them without taking water from rivers and the ecosystem.

Rooney brought things down to earth—or slightly below that—with a discussion of the state of Newton's storm drains and sewers. The city's best estimates are that inflow—the charging of the sewer system from roof leaders or sump pumps—constitutes 13 percent of the extra water seen in sewers after a rain storm, while 43 percent is infiltration—or leaks into the sewer pipes. It would take \$50 million to fix all the sewer leaks, Rooney said, but the city has only about \$2.5 million for capital improvements. However, he added that much of that can be used up by unanticipated repairs to the system.

Meanwhile, the federal government is creating new regulations for storm drains and sewers and will soon require that the city address sewer overflows—which happened three times last year at the Quinobequin

pump station, at Lyons Field and on Old Farm Road.

The city is currently addressing illegal sewer hookups of downspouts and sump pumps while changing out water meters. It is also going to have to deal with overflows that regularly occur between storm drains and the sewers. The city has a small fund for dealing with the capital needs of the stormwater system, but the flat fee charged (one for commercial, one for residential) may be neither fair nor adequate to the needs of the system, Rooney said.

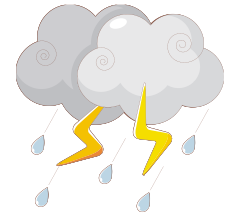
He outlined ways the city is trying to raise funds and deal with some of these issues, and noted that the job is made more complicated because of more paved surfaces and more extreme storms.

Pillsbury advocated a new kind of trickledown theory: he introduced a Low Impact Development Toolkit for businesses and homeowners (available at: www.mapc.org/resources/low-impact-dev-toolkit), adding that stormwater is a source of pollutants in the Charles River and downstream, and that local ground water is becoming depleted as more water runs off.

"We're treating stormwater like waste water, but water is a resource," he said.

The toolkit outlines ways to work with the landscape, prevent run off, and other techniques for making water a benefit rather than a problem. He showed slides of street designs, rain gardens, green roofs, swales, dry wells, cisterns and rain barrels, sidewalk planters, and plans for Blue Cities—a way to redesign urban landscapes for water retention. He was careful to note that such improvements will help with runoff, but that there were few ways to really cope with the amount of water dumped in a hurricane or the extreme rains of March 2010.

Audience questions concentrated on the city's planning for and response to flooding. Rooney noted that the city cleans half of its catch basins (what stormwater runs into from the street) each year. Ald. Deb Crossley said that the city already requires large developments to engineer to contain stormwater on site for a 100-year storm. Rooney talked about how the city was starting to



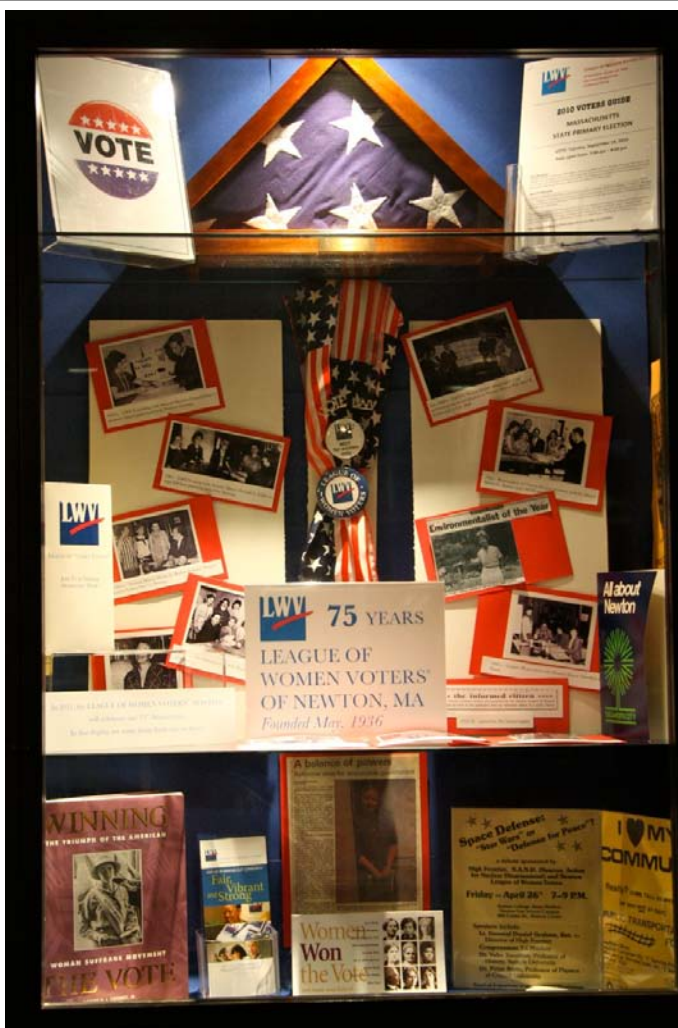
Continued on page 6

Stormwater, continued from p 5

re-configure intersections for safety, but that this was also incorporating more green. League member and forum organizer Priscilla Leith asked where the sewers and drains were in the Capital Improvement Plan. Rooney said that the sewers alone needed \$50 million in repairs, but that the department had only \$2.5 million, plus MWRA grants.

Ald. Crossley recommended that members of the audience take part in the mayor's Town Hall meetings on the budget and CIP, noting a \$1million gap in this year's water and sewer funds as well as an \$8 million overall gap for next year. "We have serious choices to make," she said.

Those who still need city help with their flooding issues should call 617-796-1640.



LWVN History at the Library

In 2011, we will celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the League of Women Voters Newton. In anticipation, a selection from the LWVN Archives will be on display during the month of November in one of the Newton Free Library's Atrium glass cases.

The display includes some photos from the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's. Can you name LWVN members who are in the photos? Email info@lwvnewton.org and tell us whom you recognize. The member who can identify the most people will win a LWV prize! Come visit the Library and see some LWVN history!

Archives Committee needs secondhand copier!

The Archives Committee is looking for a secondhand copier to help with the work of copying LWVN historical documents. If you are upgrading to a new copier, and can donate your old one to LWVN, please email info@lwvnewton.org. Thank you!

Welcome New Members!

David Cody, Waban
Marcia Cooper, Waban
Helen Rittenberg, Waban
Rachel Rosenbaum, Waban



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS NEWTON

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617-383-4598 Email: info@lwvnewton.org

November 4, 2010

Alderman Ted Hess-Mahan, Chair
Land Use Committee
Newton Board of Aldermen
City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

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Dear Chairman Hess-Mahan and Committee members:

The League of Women Voters of Newton is pleased that development at the long-neglected Omni site on Route 9 is moving forward. Like many observers, we are still mulling many aspects of this complex proposal, which undoubtedly will add needed dollars to Newton's tax base.

However, we would like to express our concern regarding one aspect of the proposed Chestnut Hill Square development—the current state of the developer's plans for pedestrian and bike access.

Newton's Comprehensive Plan calls for "strengthening alternatives to drive-alone auto transport" (p.81). We do not see provisions for this in the current proposal. Bicycling accommodations are inadequate. Pedestrian access to and through the proposed site is limited and circuitous. The walkway along Route 9 would be made less safe by the removal of the current swath of trees and grass between vehicular traffic and the sidewalk.

Given the proposed development's close proximity to dense residential housing and its phase II residential component, safe, convenient pedestrian and bicycle access not only conforms to the intent of Newton's Comprehensive Plan, but is good, sensible planning. We urge the Land Use Committee to request a revision of the current proposal that supports strengthening alternatives to drive-alone auto transport.

Sincerely,

Gail Glick
League of Women Voters of Newton

Cc: Board of Aldermen

The League of Women Voters encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Kudos to the Environmental Issues committee, which presented the letter above to the Land Use Committee meeting on November 4, 2010.

LWVN CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

3rd Wed., 9:45-12noon, **LWVN Archives Morning**, First Baptist Church Basement, Newton Centre

3rd Wed., 5:30-7 pm, **LWVN Land Use Positions Review Committee meeting**, Rm. 222, Newton City Hall

3rd Wed., 7:00pm, **LWVN Board Meeting**, Gail Glick's house

10th Wed., 11:30am-1:30pm, **LWVN Topic Meeting**, Presentation by Crystal Lake Conservancy, NewTV, 23 Needham St

17th Wed., 9:45-12noon, **LWVN Archives Morning**, First Baptist Church Basement, Newton Centre

17th Wed., 7:00pm, **Community Preservation Committee Meeting**, Cafeteria, Newton City Hall basement

18th Thurs., 5:30-7 pm, **LWVN Land Use Positions Review Committee meeting**, Rm. 222, Newton City Hall

19th Fri., 9:00am, **LWVN 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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