

Newsletter



Table of Contents

Calendar		2
The McCutcheon Decision, 2014:		2
Civics Bee: Volunteers Needed!		3
WE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS, and		3
<i>Member FAQ</i>		3
... When does the League of Women Voters of Newton meet?		3
Technology Brings Culture Shift		4
Funding Newton’s Post-Retirement Benefits –The “OPEB” Issue: Topic Meeting		5
Don’t Just Stand There ...RUN! on April 9th		5
Save Marathon Day, April 20, 2015, to Collect Signatures for <i>Charter Review</i>		6
Save the date for our latest parking forum on April 23, 2015		6
Sunday, April 26th: Save the Date for LWVN’s Champagne and Chocolate Event!		7
LWVNewton Letters to the Mayor and Board of Aldermen		7
LWVNewton Letters to the Newton TAB		8
More notes of possible interest:		10
Money in Politics Forum Up and Running		10
League Opposes Attempt to Block Potential Tool to Address Carbon Pollution (NEW)		10
Webinar Recording: Putting Together a Local Action Plan		10
Action Alert: Urge the President to Fully Reject the Keystone XL Pipeline		10
LWV Online Store Closing April 30 - Inventory Available at Little to No Cost		10
Sewer & water rates update		11

LWV of Newton P O Box 610207 Newton MA 02461 617-383-4598 www.lwvnewton.org info@lwvnewton.org

Tuesday, April 7, 7:30pm:

Steering Committee Meeting

Wednesday, April 8, 11:30am:

Topic Meeting: Zoning Reform

Wednesday, April 8, 7:30pm:

Board Meeting - Rescheduled date

Thursday, April 9, 3:30pm:

Environmental Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 9, 7:30pm:

Don't Just Stand There, Run!

Thursday, April 23, 7:00pm:

Forum: The Neighborhood Benefits of Parking

Sunday, April 26, 4:00pm:

Spring Fundraiser?

Tuesday, April 28:

Day on the Hill

Tuesday, May 5, 7:30pm:

Steering Committee Meeting

Wednesday, May 13, 11:30am:

LWVN Topic Meeting: OPEB & Long Term Financial Liabilities

Thursday, May 14, 3:30pm:

Environmental Com'tee Meeting

Thursday, May 14, 7:30pm:

LWVN Board Meeting

Thursday, May 28, 6:30pm:

Annual Meeting

Wednesday, June 10, 11:30am:

Topic Meeting: Civil Discourse

Thursday, June 11, 7:30pm:

LWVN Board Meeting

The McCutcheon Decision, 2014:

From Nancy Tate at the LWVUS, 2 Apr 2015: Today, April 2, marks one year since the Supreme Court invalidated limits on the total amount an individual can donate to candidates or political parties in *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission* (FEC).

On April 2, 2014 the Supreme Court invalidated limits on the total amount an individual can give to candidates or political parties in *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*.

"The *McCutcheon* decision simply means more power for big money, more corruption for the rest of us."

--Elisabeth MacNamara, president of the League of Women Voters of the United States



Share this image if you agree that the power of our democracy should be in the hands of the people-- not the highest bidder.



As LWVUS president Elisabeth MacNamara stated at the time, **in this decision the Court said that big money is worth more than the voices of individual citizens.**

[Help us mark this unhappy anniversary, share this image with your Facebook network.](#)

The 2014 midterm elections were held just six months after this decision, but the results were dramatic:

The 2014 midterm elections were the **most expensive midterms in U.S. history**: Although the amount of money spent went up, the number of donors actually went down. A mere 604 individual donors were able to pump **\$31 million more into the election than if the limits stayed in place**—that's \$51,234 more per donor! This isn't the way democracy is supposed to work. Coupled with the disastrous decision in *Citizens United*, which led to the rise

of SuperPACs by allowing unlimited spending by outside groups, our election system is being taken over by an increasingly small number of wealthy donors and special interests who are trying to buy our politicians.

The League of Women Voters is fighting back against this rising tide, pushing for regulations to ensure that our democracy is in the hands of the people—not the highest bidder.

Civics Bee: Volunteers Needed!

Let's get started on the next LWVN civics bee! Last year, LWVN held a civics bee at the Brown Middle School...and we'd like to make this an annual event. Bring your ideas and knowledge to work with other LWVN members in encouraging and recognizing students who learn about our local, state and national governments. We have our model from last year, plus info from other Massachusetts Leagues, as a place to start. Contact info@newtonleague.org to volunteer or ask for more information.



WE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS, and ...

Sami O'Reilly and Kathleen Hobson

.....
... And for all our members, here is an update of the Newton League practices:

Member FAQ

... When does the League of Women Voters of Newton meet?

The LWVN has member meetings every month from September until April or May. Most of the time, these are called "topic" (formerly called "unit") meetings, because we will be learning about or discussing a particular topic (see our [Topic Meeting Archives](#)). Members of the public are welcome to attend. In December, we forgo a topic, and just party. In May or June, we have our [Annual Meeting](#), and besides having a nice dinner and a speech from someone interesting, we vote in a new board and decide where we will focus our efforts during the next year.

We also meet in subcommittee. We currently have subcommittees working on education, the environment, housing, municipal finance, elections and voter service. These meetings are usually at a member's home and are listed on our [calendar](#). Other subcommittees are formed as the interest and need arises.

Our board meetings happen every month. All members are welcome to come and participate! Check the [calendar](#) for dates.

To learn more, [email us](#) at info@lwvnewton.org

Newton's reliance on parent donations to fund basic classroom and teaching technology is rather unusual in the state, according to presenters at the League of Voters' monthly topic meeting, December 10, 2014.

Still, funding these now-essential purchases is a challenge across Newton and the entire Commonwealth.

Other school departments bond for such purchases and upgrades or fund them from their operating budgets.

But because of parent generosity, last spring the district had enough devices to be able to pilot the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) tests, which will replace the current MCAS. One advantage of using technology for test taking is to provide teachers with timely information to inform instruction and provide student support.

The School Committee has pushed recently to fund technology as part of its regular budget – and new elementary schools like the under-construction Angier School will come with upgraded technology for all its new classrooms, teachers and specialists.

Currently, a laptop for each teacher and basic presentation hardware and software for each classroom is standard in the district. So is Wi-Fi in each school.

But purchasing hardware for elementary schools is often still a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) function, and as a result inequities between schools continue to be an issue.

Jennifer Abbot of the PTO Council noted the hours of volunteer work she and her peers spent sorting out Newton's equity policy, which limits how PTOs can spend parent-raised funds. PTOs may spend unlimited amounts on community-building events, but amounts spent on curriculum related items like field trips, libraries and technology are capped to try to keep education equitable citywide.

"Our study found differences in the focus on technology spending, a lack of oversight and confusion among PTOs as to their role," Abbot told the gathering of 30 League members and guests.

And there are still schools with less technology than others, as well as a gap between what the schools would like to offer and what they have and a driving question of how to stay updated.

"The whole community needs to wrestle with funding technology in a more sustainable fashion," said Margie Ross-Decter, a member of the Newton School Committee. "We need to do so much still and having to decide between teachers and technology is a terrible place to be," she said. "It's a common issue across the state."

"Because of technology, teachers now share pictures, videos and class work with parents or other teachers, and can organize both their students' work and their own," said Michelle Callaghan, who teaches fifth grade at Angier with Amy Wink. They also talked about how technology can be used to reach children who otherwise have immense difficulty speaking or writing.

Favorite student applications include building a battery from a banana and finding ways for students to ask questions without raising a hand. Also, teachers can individualize lessons for different learning styles and enable independent learning.

Asked about parent concerns regarding too much screen time in children's lives, Callaghan explained, "We are integrating and limiting screen time. We are using technology to activate, reinforce and allow access to information for students."

....Leo Brehm, director of information technology for the School Department, talked about his efforts to establish norms about how technology should be used in the classroom across all elementary schools. "The baseline we set was five devices per classroom and three carts of 25 laptops per school," he said, noting that the cost of bringing each school to the baseline minimum was already a challenge.

....But the schools' goal is not technology for its own sake, he stressed, but supporting the core curriculum and enhancing academic content for the teachers and students. Brehm also noted the schools' focus on deliverable materials rather than on a particular device or system. As some devices have longer useful lives, he is factoring both longevity and cost into purchasing decisions.

....But whether to invest or not is no longer a question, he said. "Technology makes it possible to engage students and parents outside of the school day with peers and teachers," he said, calling it a "cultural shift."

Funding Newton's Post-Retirement Benefits –The "OPEB" Issue: Topic Meeting

Please join us on **Wed, April 8, 11:30 am – 1:00 pm at NewTV, 23 Needham St., Newton**

Brown-bag lunches welcome

Employees of the City of Newton earn both current (salary) and deferred compensation. Newton's employees receive their deferred compensation – pensions, post-retirement healthcare, and similar benefits – once certain age service thresholds are met and the employee retires.

While Newton is required to set money aside to cover future employee pension liabilities, there are currently no such requirements for Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) such as healthcare. As a result, OPEB are paid against current year budgets as needed, and future needs show up as an unfunded liability on the City's balance sheet.

This month's topic meeting will explain the OPEB issue, provide an understanding of what risks the OPEB problem poses for the City's financial health, and discuss strategies that other municipalities have used to address such future funding needs.

Our speakers will be:

- **Tony Logalbo** – Finance Director, Town of Concord
 - An explanation of the OPEB problem and Newton's current situation
 - Discussion of other municipalities' strategies
- **Maureen Lemieux** – *CFO, City of Newton*
 - Discussion of Newton's plans to fund OPEB in the near- and long-term

Each speaker will have the opportunity to speak for 15 minutes, followed by open discussion among all attendees.

Don't Just Stand There ...RUN! on April 9th

Thursday, April 9, 2015, from 7:30 p.m. – 9 p.m.

**at Brigham House, 20 Hartford Street,
Newton Highlands.**

How to Run a Campaign for Local Public Office: Considering public office? Helping someone run for office? Interested in how local campaigns work? The League of Women Voters of Newton invites candidates, potential candidates, campaign managers, campaign treasurers, and all interested citizens to a workshop that offers practical information and advice about political campaigns by a group of knowledgeable panelists:

- **David Olson, Newton City Clerk**, will give an overview of the local filing and state requirements
- **Claire Sokoloff, former School Committee Chair**, will discuss being a candidate and elected Official
- **Greg Reibman, President of the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce**, Village 14 founder and former Newton TAB Publisher, will discuss effective **Press/Media communications**

Contact the League of Women Voters of Newton at [617-383-4598](tel:617-383-4598) or info@lwvnewton.org with any questions.

[Save Marathon Day, April 20, 2015, to Collect Signatures for Charter Review](#)

A recent Tab Editorial reminded readers that Newton, now approaching a population of 90,000, has not reviewed the city charter since “Teddy Mann was a year away from becoming mayor, the Vietnam War was raging and TV viewers were just getting to know Archie and Edith Bunker.”

<<<<< A letter from Rhanna Kidwell, Chair of the petition drive >>>>>

Hello to all, and Happy Spring!

It's hard to imagine weather bad enough to make me miss collecting signatures for our city's Charter Review, but that was February! I thought spring might never arrive, but it has, and we can now get back to it!

If you recall my last email before the winter hiatus, we need 1,000-2,000 signatures (probably on the lower end of that range), and we need to get them by the end of June. This is very doable...we got 800+ on Election Day in November, and another 1,000+ in the month of October, all with a small but enthusiastic volunteer crew. I think Marathon Monday will be a great opportunity, if we have the volunteers and good weather.

The plan is to meet at Newton's War Memorial at City Hall at 11:00 on April 20. The elite runners will be passing through about then. We will wear our t-shirts and split up into groups, and each group will take a direction (east or west) and a side of Commonwealth Ave. (The idea is for people to collect on the side they live on, so we can all get home!) We'll just go for 1 to 1.5 hours, whatever individuals feel comfortable with.

Please let me know if you can help out on Marathon Day, April 20th, and if you have any petitions in your possession! (Rhannakidwell@comcast.net)

Thanks,

Rhanna Kidwell

For detailed LWVN information on the Charter Initiative, [click](#) here,
Or contact Ann Grantham at 617-964-0333 or email to Ann at agrant46@gmail.com

[Save the date for our latest parking forum on April 23, 2015](#)

7:00 – 8:45 p.m. at the Druker Auditorium, Newton Free Library, 330 Homer St., Newton

Newton's Parking: new solutions to a seemingly intractable problem

One of the bigger challenges in Newton's older village centers, parking is also key to village vitality.

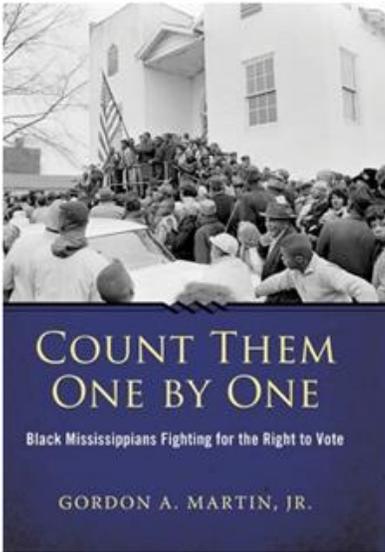
A library forum April 23 will explain some of the cutting-edge ideas used in cities across America to unlock the potential of public, on-street parking by using the marketplace to set pricing (called “dynamic pricing”), ensuring optimal space vacancy rates while returning funds to the business district.

This forum will update fans of the popular 2013 LWVN forum on [parking](#) on the latest parking policy tools available to municipalities in Massachusetts.

Who: Jessica Robertson, planner at the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), and developer of the ParkSmart Initiative; Sean Roche, editor of Newton's Parking Management Plan

Sponsored by the Newton Free Library and the Newton League of Women Voters

Sunday, April 26th: Save the Date for LWVN's Champagne and Chocolate Event!



LWVN is pleased to present Gordon Martin, Jr., as our featured speaker on April 26th at LWVN's Champagne and Chocolate Event, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the All Newton Music School. Judge Martin is author of *Count Them One By One: Black Mississippians Fighting for the Right to Vote*, the personal account of a community and a lawyer united to battle one of the most recalcitrant bastions of resistance to civil rights.

As this is also the day of [Newton Serves](#), there will be special recognitions for those wearing **Newton Serves T-shirts!**

Look for your invitation in the mail or RSVP at <http://www.lwvnewton.org/>

LWVNewton Letters to the Mayor and Board of Aldermen

***** October 30, 2014 *****

Hon. Setti D. Warren
Scott F. Lennon, President of the Board of Aldermen

Re: Plastic bags

Dear Mayor Warren and members of the Board of Aldermen:

The LWV Newton Board is strongly in favor of enacting a ban on plastic bags of the type provided at large retail establishments (3 mils or less). The proposed ban excludes thicker, reusable bags, which are much less likely to end up in trees and in storm drains that empty into our waterways. The ban exempts stores less than 3,500 square feet, doggie bags and the small bags provided for produce (not at check-out stations).

The UN Environmental Program estimates that there are now 46,000 pieces of plastic litter in every square mile of ocean on the planet. Plastic does not biodegrade; it breaks down into smaller and smaller particles. These "micro plastics" remain in the environment forever, regularly being consumed by marine organisms.

Plastic bag bans in the US and throughout the world lessen the volume of plastic waste significantly, especially in the oceans; it turns out that they do not have a negative impact on sales in localities where they have been enacted. Instead, many more people use paper bags and reusable bags or forego bags entirely. Paper bags are only marginally more expensive than single use plastic bags and can be made from sustainably harvested trees, or 80% recycled material.

Many local businesses support the ban. The Mayor's Plastic Bag Working Group, which thoroughly canvassed six Newton villages, learned that few local businesses use the targeted bags, and concluded that a ban would have little or no economic impact in Newton.

Bans have been enacted in five Massachusetts cities and towns, including neighboring Brookline, where one million bags a month are now being removed from the waste stream. Bans are currently being considered in Watertown, Wellesley, Medford, Cambridge and Somerville. By enacting a plastic bag ban, Newton would demonstrate its commitment to sustainable practices and set an example for other municipalities. This ordinance will make a huge difference over time.

Sincerely yours,

Bonnie Carter, Clerk

***** November 14, 2014 *****

Hon. Setti Warren

Scott F. Lennon, President of the Board of Aldermen

Re: Sidewalk Snow Clearing

Dear Mayor Warren, President Lennon and Members of the Board of Aldermen:

The League of Women Voters of Newton (LWVN) strongly supports a strengthened sidewalk snow-clearing ordinance. Since the 1970s, LWVN has advocated for a requirement for residents to clear their sidewalks to reduce the dangers to pedestrians in winter. This would mean all our citizens, including our most vulnerable—the elderly, disabled, and children—can walk on sidewalks instead of in the street alongside cars.

We strongly encourage our elected officials to commit to enforce the residential sidewalk clearing ordinances as well as the snow dumping ordinance. We are hopeful that the possibility of serious penalties will prevent a repeat of past years, when sidewalk-clearing was essentially unenforceable and sidewalks were blocked with snow.

We thank you for your efforts to keep pedestrian mobility and safety a priority in Newton.

Sincerely yours,

Bonnie Carter

Spokesperson

LWVNewton Letters to the Newton TAB

***** February 8, 2015 *****

To the Editor,

The League of Women Voters of Newton (LWVN) regularly evaluates and comments on proposals to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), the group responsible for how the City of Newton spends taxpayer money set aside for community preservation. LWVN greatly appreciates the hard work members of the CPC do to weigh each proposal fairly and with an eye to benefit all Newton residents within the CPA guidelines.

Regarding the proposal to build two units of affordable housing on Taft Avenue in Auburndale, LWVN believes this fits CPA guidelines, as well as the Comprehensive Plan and Newton's Housing and Community Development Plans. Newton needs more affordable housing as housing prices rise to keep socioeconomic diversity in our community.

CAN-DO, the project developer is a well-known and highly regarded organization that has already successfully completed many affordable housing projects. In fact, LWV readers noted that CAN-DO's Eddy Street project, also funded with CPA money, came in under budget, ahead of time and was overall an excellent project.

The main concern about this project related to its cash flow. The developer's fee, as a percentage, has come in very low. LWVN recommends raising that percentage closer to a traditional developer's fee to support operations and support services. Failing that, the CPC should work with CAN-DO to develop a fund for predictive maintenance, which could come out of utility savings or CPC funds, to ensure the sustainability of this and future affordable housing projects.

Newton's CPA has, according to its own reports, spent just 31% of its funds on community housing through 2012. We are disappointed that more affordable housing applications have not been submitted in recent years. The CPA itself is in good shape--even were this proposal and other FY15 proposals funded at asking levels, the fund would have a balance of \$6 million before FY16 requests are submitted.

Affordable housing is urgently needed in Newton, and LWVN strongly supports adding units of permanently affordable housing, particularly scattered-site, small, in-fill development of this kind. Our reader/volunteers were unanimous in strongly supporting this proposal.

Sincerely,
Bonnie Carter
Spokesperson, LWVN

***** February 14, 2015 *****

To the Editor,

Joshua Norman wrote in his Opinion piece, "Newton's high cost of educating out-of-district students" (Dec 17, 2014) that it is "wrong to keep forcing Newton taxpayers to pay to educate these children". We disagree. The cost to Newton taxpayers for continuing to educate out-of-district students must be viewed in the context of the benefits to Newton's children and to our entire community.

The vast majority of Newton's out-of-district students participate in METCO, arguably our school system's best tool for counteracting pervasive prejudices and misunderstandings about race that continue to plague our society 150 years after the abolition of slavery. Our participation in the METCO program shows Newton children from a young age that it is important to our community to learn, work and play with people of all races.

METCO has, for decades, been providing opportunities for children in suburban Newton, which is not racially diverse, to learn alongside--and create lifelong bonds with-- inner city children, especially African American children.

METCO enjoys broad support from Newton's citizens because of our community's strong commitment to equality and diversity, especially the goal of racial diversity in our schools. In addition, parents and educators understand that diversity in the classroom promotes critical thinking and enhances problem solving skills.

The League of Women Voters of Newton, along with the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts and local Leagues in other communities in the Boston area, have supported METCO from its inception and support it today. Newton's continued funding of this proven program is money well spent.

Bonnie Carter, Spokesperson
LWV Board of Directors

More notes of possible interest:

Money in Politics Forum Up and Running

The Money in Politics Forum is now active for League members who are interested in discussing the Money in Politics review and update. Barbara Zia, MIP Committee Chair will moderate the forum. To sign up, go to the [Member Resources Site](http://forum.lwv.org) (forum.lwv.org), sign in and join the [Money in Politics Forum](#) (listed under Forums in the red navigation bar). If you have already signed up for the Money in Elections Forum, that has now been combined with Money in Politics, so there is no need to register. You may also reach Barbara directly at MIPCommitteeChair@lwv.org.

League Opposes Attempt to Block Potential Tool to Address Carbon Pollution (NEW)

The League joined a [fact sheet](#) sent to U.S. Senators opposing an amendment proposed by Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO) that would block a potential tool to address carbon pollution. Amendment #928 was proposed and accepted during the vote-a-rama surrounding debate on the U.S. Senate's proposed federal budget.

Webinar Recording: Putting Together a Local Action Plan

The LWVUS Program Planning and Support (PP&S) Committee webinar featuring LWVUS Advocacy Chair Chris Carson and state Leaders outlined the basics of creating a local action plan. The webinar was designed to help Leagues learn and review the basics for creating an advocacy campaign. [You can view a recording of the webinar here.](#)

Action Alert: Urge the President to Fully Reject the Keystone XL Pipeline

President Obama fulfilled his promise to [veto legislation](#) approving the Keystone XL (KXL) pipeline! The League is proud to stand behind the President's veto because the pipeline is not in our national interest. *But the fight is not over* - President Obama and the U.S. State Department must still make a final decision on the Keystone XL pipeline. [Thank President Obama for vetoing the pipeline legislation and urge him to reject final approval of the Keystone XL pipeline once and for all!](#)

LWV Online Store Closing April 30 - Inventory Available at Little to No Cost

LWVUS will be closing its online store at the end of April due to low demand for products and publications, and the high cost of maintaining this business. At the same time, we are exploring alternative avenues that will allow LWVUS to offer core organizational publications through more efficient and cost effective means. Stay tuned for future details. Between now and store's closing, we are offering Leagues and members one last opportunity to get branded LWV items and publications at rock bottom prices. Some items are even FREE (shipping and handling charges apply)! Check out what is still available in [the online store](#) and act fast. Items available right now include LWV publications "Observing Your Government In Action," "Membership Brochure," "Vote" brochure (Spanish & English), and "5 Things you need to know on Election Day cards" (Spanish only). In addition, branded items such as note cards, tumblers, tattoos and pins are also available. **The last day to place orders is April 15th** (easy to remember since it's Tax Day)! Inquiries should be directed to publications@lwv.org.

FY2015-16 WATER, SEWER AND STORMWATER RATES

from Priscilla Leith

Rate options to be discussed at the Public Facilities Committee meeting at 7 p.m. on April 8, 2015, in Room 204 at City Hall.

Water, sewer and stormwater rates will come before the Board of Aldermen. The proposed rates, as of April 12, are not yet available. Mayor Setti Warren has pledged that water, sewer and stormwater rates taken together, will not be raised more than 3.9% above current rates.

[N.b. – We will track the rate setting process, so please be watching for messages from LWVN when the rates are posted and when they are firm. That may take a while. – *ed.*]

*Newsletter editor: J. Douglas Leith jdleith@verizon.net
With help and direction by Ann Grantham*

***** **End of Newsletter** *****