
League of Women Voters of Newton

Newsletter

Volume 15, Issue 4

visit us online at www.lwvnewton.org

May 2009

Annual Meeting 2009

by Lisa Mirabile

On May 7, the League of Women Voters Newton held its Annual Meeting from 6:30 to 9:30 at the Newton Senior Center. Members were treated to delightful performances from two *a capella* groups, the Northern Lights, from Newton North, and the Newtones, from Newton South, while they enjoyed a lavish potluck spread.

After enjoying the fine food and entertainment, the meeting got down to business. LWVN president Terry Yoffie gave

her President's Report (see page 5), followed by the Treasurer's Report from long-time board member and treasurer Andrea Kozinetz, who is stepping down from the board this year. Sue Rosenbaum next presented this year's Jane Leighton Award to Sharyn Roberts with a traditionally lighthearted address (see below) – though she wasn't able to keep the audience in suspense for long once she described this year's winner as someone who has "almost figured out how to be in three places at once."

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And the Winner is...

Sharyn Roberts Wins 2009 Jane Leighton Award

Address by Susan Rosenbaum, Annual Meeting, May 7, 2009

Every organization needs someone like our 2009 Jane Leighton Award winner. This year's recipient is one of the most dedicated volunteers that I have ever met. She has almost figured out how to be in three places at once (although her sense of direction could use a little help). It would take a very long time to enumerate all the ways our winner has contributed to the League, so I will try to touch on just a few.

Our Jane Leighton winner this year has devoted countless hours of her time, energy, and financial support to make sure that all our events are well attended and well presented. She has served on many different committees during the past several years, including a committee where she serves as the League's liaison. She refers to this committee as the "snick" committee, which I finally figured out is actually the Sustainable Newton Committee. She has single-handedly registered thousands of new voters and she even offers to drive them to the polls so they actually vote. If the polling location is daunting she even brings them to City Hall for absentee voting.

Last year she designed, ordered and addressed by hand over 200 hundred invitations so that our Champagne and Chocolate event would look more attractive. She even hand delivered a few to save on postage. This year's winner really knows how to be a good scout as well as a devoted League member. She is always prepared for every possible event with pamphlets, membership forms, League signs, name tags, and of course cookies, coffee, and crudités.

As the chair of Voter Service, our winner has run more candidate forums than she probably cares to count and has set up for more topic meetings than most of us have attended. She has served on the Local Action committee as well as the Election Commission committee. She has also participated in every phonathon that has been held and helped raise lots of money for both the State League as well as our own. If all this is not enough to convince you that Y, as she calls herself, is deserving of this award, she has also contributed her daughter to the cause, or at least to next year's board. So, without further ado, will Sharyn Roberts please come up and accept this year's Jane Leighton Award. ♦

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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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open

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Andreae Downs

Topic Meetings

Pat Acton
Linda Morrison
Carol Ann Shea

Voter Service/Citizen Education

Bonnie Carter
Barbara Sydney

Annual Meeting, Continued from page 1

Next on the agenda came a review of the work of the bylaws committee, which was charged with bringing the LWVN's bylaws into the 21st century and clarifying a number of confusing sections. Gail Glick and Lisa Mirabile reviewed the proposed changes, with the audience gamely trying to keep track of articles, sections, clauses and page numbers. A copy of the new bylaws document will soon be available on our website at www.lwvnewton.org.

Anne Borg presented this year's Local Program, highlighted by a proposal to undertake a study of the city charter. Sandy Butzel described the study that she, Rhanna Kidwell and Lynne Sullivan volunteered to chair; after a few questions and answers the charter review study, along with the rest of the program, were approved unanimously. Next, after approving a budget, the meeting approved the slate proposed by the nominating committee, bidding a reluctant farewell to departing members Ann Grantham and Andrea Kozinetz and welcoming five new members: Tami Roberts as treasurer; Mindy Peckler as clerk; and Sandy Butzel, Ellen Glusman, and Carol Ann Shea as new directors. The evening concluded with a few thoughtful directions to the board from a handful of members.

Tremendous thanks are due to Andrea Kozinetz, who, as last year's Jane Leighton Award winner, also won the job of organizing the meeting: finding a location; deciding about food options and entertainment – and also putting together the invaluable meeting workbook. Brava for a job well done! ♦

Son of Trash (Cash in the Trash II)

by the Environmental Committee

The League of Women Voters of Newton and its many partners continued trash talking April 7 with a second library forum on automated trash pickup and pay-as-you-throw trash fees. By the Tuesday forum, the Board of Aldermen had already voted in the funding for full implementation of auto pickup for both trash and recycling, former Alderman Brooke Lipsitt, the League moderator, told the roughly 70-person crowd.

Behind the board's quick action was the successful pilot program, begun in November, of single-stream recycling and auto rubbish pickup in all of the city's most technically difficult neighborhoods, said Tom Daley, head of the Department of Public Works. Surveys conducted by the DPW indicated that 91% of pilot households were satisfied with the auto trash pickup and 95% with the single-stream recycling (where all recyclables go into the same can, no sorting). Respondents (45% of those mailed surveys) even liked the city-supplied 64-gallon wheeled cart, and only 17% said that they needed more than 64 gallons to hold all their garbage.

At the same time, Daley said, the DPW measured trash volume in pilot and non-pilot areas of the city. In the neighborhoods with single-stream recycling, which is easier to use, the amount of trash dropped 27% more than in non-pilot neighborhoods. Recycling also increased, Daley said.

As a result of the Board's almost-unanimous endorsement of the auto-trash system, the city will start distributing 53,000 barrels, or two per household—a blue one for trash and a green one for recycling, both of which will be picked up by a robot arm on contractors' trucks—in the summer and over the fall. Residents can get either a 64-gallon or 36-gallon barrel for trash, and can buy extra bags in stores and at city buildings throughout Newton for \$2.25/bag. Those who want extra trash capacity can get a second barrel for \$200/year. Daley hopes to have the system fully operational by mid-fall. As a result, he hopes to save as much as \$1m a year in collection and disposal costs for the city, or about \$90,000 a month. Had the city changed nothing, it would have cost two million more per year by 2015.

The city could save considerably more, said Kevin Dutt of the Citizen Advisory Group, if it implemented the CAG's recommendation to institute a pay-as-you-throw (or pay-per-bag) trash fee system. According to the group's calculations, the trash fee could save the city up to \$6.8 million (the total cost of trash and recycling collection and dispos-

al) annually. The system is "one of the best options to generate a high level of cash" for the city, Dutt said.

That's in part because residents have a cash incentive to trash less and recycle more. Since trash tipping costs (what we pay the incinerator) are \$140/ton, and recycling costs are \$100/ton, any time the city diverts one of the 30,000 tons of trash it produces into recycling, it saves \$40. Currently, Dutt said, 35% of communities in the Commonwealth use pay-as-you-throw fee systems. Dutt argued that under the current system, people who recycle subsidize those who don't.

“Surveys conducted by the DPW indicated that 91% of pilot households were satisfied with the auto trash pickup and 95% with the single-stream recycling.”

With the auto trash and recycling system, and no change in recycling rates, the city stands to save about \$1 million annually, Dutt said. Newton has had a recycling rate of 40% since the 1990s. He argued that 90% or more of Newton households could probably manage with a smaller trash barrel, simply by recycling more rigorously. If the city implemented a full PAYT system, where everyone had to put all trash in a paid-for bag, the city could save the full cost of trash and recycling and recycling rates could rise, conservatively, to 60%, Dutt said.

Audience questions were on whether the auto trash system could get barrels behind parked cars. Elaine Gentile, the city's trash czar, said that the pilot had included Walnut Street, where commuters park all day in front of homes, and trash barrels had been collected without trouble. Another question was on whether the city was going to implement single-stream recycling in its own buildings. Daley said yes, it was already occurring. On further questioning, he admitted trouble in getting recycling into parks.

Another issue that arose was whether the city should have entered into competitive bidding for the collection services; the Board of Aldermen just signed off on a non-competitive contract with Waste Management for five years. Daley said that the company has worked in Newton for the last 20 years and knows both the geography and the high level of service the city expects.

When asked about getting recycling into condo complex-

Cash in the Trash II, continued on page 7

Critical Choices for Newton: 2009 and Beyond

Our series of forums about the work of the Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) is coming to a close. On April 6th, the LWVN and its co-sponsors presented the results of the CAG's Municipal Cost and the Performance Management reports, and on May 4th, we presented the CAG's work on the city's Capital Infrastructure. Our final forum, "A Summing Up," will be held June 3 from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM at the Newton Free Library.

Municipal Costs & Performance Management

The agenda for our third forum grew at the last minute, capitalizing on the release of the CAG report on Performance Management a few days earlier. After a brief presentation on the Municipal Cost Report by Tony Logalbo and another on Performance Management by Bill MacKenzie, the audience was divided into four groups, each assigned a different topic to discuss.

One group, led by Kent Portney and George Foord, discussed citizen participation in performance management. The group agreed that citizen participation was a good thing that is worth encouraging, although several doubted that more meetings alone would increase participation. Instead, the group wanted to see the city provide as many options for citizens to give feedback as possible, and also urged greater use of technology, such as streaming video of meetings online, to make it easier for citizens to stay informed and engaged. Another critical element is that politicians be sure to present new ideas early on so that direct stakeholders have a meaningful part in any decision making process. Last, the group emphasized how important it is that elected officials listen well and be open to new ideas.

A second group, led by Tony Logalbo and Kevin Dutt, discussed shifting some of the city's cost structure from taxes to fees, focusing on what guiding principles should govern any such changes. One essential starting point, the group agreed, making sure we have data about the cost of providing any service. Next, there was agreement that how broadly a service is used should be an important criterion. For example, the group agreed it might make sense for users of recreational programs to pay fees that covered the cost of providing the programs rather than asking all taxpayers to subsidize something used by only a few. However, the group wanted to be sure that scholarships or fee waivers were available for households that might not be able to participate otherwise. Many liked the idea of providing a basic level of service through taxes – say, a certain amount of trash picked up per household – and then charging fees for use in excess

of that.

A third group was led by Bill MacKenzie and Mal Salter and tackled the question of pay for performance, asking whether we should use increased salaries as a reward for performance and whether higher pay is actually a motivator. In the end, a slight majority of the group concurred that direct monetary rewards for performance were not likely to be very effective: instead, the group thought we should offer reasonable salaries but motivate workers in other ways, such as through effective leadership. The whole group readily agreed that all workers should be held accountable to specific standards of performance, noting that standards varied by job, and that some jobs carried higher expectations than others.

The last group, led by Ruthanne Fuller, discussed pay levels. The discussion began with the fact that Newton city and school employees earn, on average, slightly more than their counterparts in comparable communities. The main question they discussed was whether higher salaries correlate with higher quality candidates; that is, whether we need to pay more to attract top candidates. The group agreed that Newton doesn't aspire to be "average" and that the city should aim to be an employer of choice, but that we must seek the point of maximum value. They also noted that Newton is competing against other towns facing similar fiscal problems. Another fact that the group discussed was that while teacher contracts do have specific performance benchmarks, after remaining in the system for three years, teachers essentially have tenure, a system that many agreed deserved closer examination. In contrast, there are no overt benchmarks for municipal employees, which the group felt was an important issue that needed to be addressed. In the end, there was overall agreement that Newton salary ranges should be in the top quartile among similar communities.

Capital Infrastructure and Planning: Investing in the city's bricks and mortar

Newton has been borrowing against its roads and buildings and is underfunding them to the tune of \$20 million a year. The resulting backlog in needed maintenance and replacement runs at least \$300 million.

At the League of Women Voters of Newton forum May 4, roughly 40 participants began to tackle the *Critical Choices* presented by the Citizen Advisory Group's report on Newton's capital infrastructure.

The city's roughly \$1.2 billion in capital assets are just one part of the city's larger financial picture, but it is one

Critical Choices, continued on page 7

President's Report: Annual Meeting 2009

I have many to thank tonight. First, I want to thank this year's Officers and Board of Directors. I owe a sizeable debt of gratitude to our three very capable Vice Presidents, our Treasurer, Clerk, board and off-board members. Without their commitment and leadership, we would not have accomplished all the many things we did this year. Their vision and close attention to detail increased our membership and developed a strong member tracking system, improved our communications, raised the League's visibility in the community, educated and registered voters, opened up League actions on new issues, and worked closely with the Citizen Advisory Group to get the word out and start the needed conversations about our city's financial problems. We educated citizens about solid waste management options, and began working with the election department to establish training and performance review of poll workers. I also want to remind you of those who did not take board positions but chaired important committees. They were Shari Arntz, Nancy Criscitiello, Carol Ann Shea, Linda Morrison, Andreae Downs, Myra Tattenbaum, Beth Lowd, Lucia Dolan, Deb Crossley and Priscilla Leith.

I want to say a special thanks to Priscilla Leith, Bonnie Carter, Pat Acton, Beth Lowd, Mary Adelstein, AnnaMaria Abernathy, and Ann Grantham who have tirelessly worked with us this year as they have for so many years. These women continue working in areas that are critical to our success including preserving our archives, revising our by-laws, reviewing the work of the Community Preservation Committee, providing a historical perspective, helping with meetings, mentoring less experienced board members and involving us on Newton's environmental issues.

I am sorry to advise you of our retiring board members and officers. They are Ann Grantham and Andrea Kozinetz. Each provided her views and added many valuable contributions to our organization.

A special thank you goes to our Nominating Committee who took such care in putting together the slate of officers and board members that you will vote on tonight. The committee included Leslie Burg, Andrea Kelley, Andrea Kozinetz, Robin Maltz and Barbara Sydney and their hard work has strengthened our League.

Deb Crossley and Lucia Dolan spent countless hours alongside Priscilla Leith and Beth Lowd regarding local actions and the environment. The Board never tired of receiving their requests that we take a position on a local issue or let them develop a program. The "Cash in the Trash" forums were presented to standing room only

crowds and the work the Community Preservation Committee reviewers did was so very important to the effective application of CPA funds. If you visit our action log, you will see the many issues upon which the League took a formal stance.

Thanks go to Myra Tattenbaum and Leslie Burg for giving their time to organize the work on the Charter Study proposal as well as reengage the League with Housing. I look forward to their future work on Housing in Newton.

Andreae Downs trained observers this year, kept track of city meetings that needed attending, assisted with local action, worked tirelessly on our newsletter, and most importantly never said no when I asked her to edit my written pieces. Lisa Mirabile oversaw our Communications and used her publishing and writing talents to bring us front and center in the League's and the city's communications. She also changed the way we put together our newsletter and erased a significant amount of costs from our budget while working hard on the bylaws, education and CAG committees. Lisa's wisdom and calm frequently settled difficult issues at board and committee meetings.

Susan Rosenbaum was always ready and willing to advise me on whatever issue I brought to her. She never hesitated and provided me with ideas that always worked. She also was so very calm! She managed the challenges of getting Legislative Roundtable taped every month, served on the Municipal Finance Committee, and supported Voters Service and Elections efforts.

Our Treasurer Andrea Kozinetz kept us in the black all year. She was always ready with the Treasurer's report and we will miss her wise counsel at our board meetings. Andrea also worked hard with our budget chair Shari Arntz in crafting the 2009-2010 budget in your annual meeting workbook plus, served on the nominating and CPC review committees.

I want to commend other Board members that gave so much of your time, energy, and expertise. Ellen Gibson and Gail Glick worked together on Education. They also served as our legal advisors on the bylaws committee. Gail served as our clerk and provided excellent and timely coverage of board meetings with her minutes. Anne Borg taught us everything about membership markedly improving our tracking and recruiting methods and hosted our presidential election night, holiday and new member welcome parties. She also was the key member of the League this year who kept an eye on details that most of us would not have noticed. This is a great skill she has shared with

us and it has made us so much more effective as an organization and our events so successful. Most importantly, she served as a reality check to some of my more crazy ideas.

We spent the year studying the municipal finances of the city with the Citizen Advisory Group and together organized five forums to educate Newton about the financial state of our city and provided opportunities to discuss what services we value most and hope to see continued despite the financial challenges ahead. Three of our members worked tirelessly for this city as members of the Citizen Advisory Group, Mal Salter as Chair, Ruthanne Fuller as Vice-Chair, and George Foord. We also had a fantastic group of members involved from the League's Municipal Finance Committee including Andreae Downs, Anne Borg, Ellen Grody, Ted Hess Mahan, Sue Rosenbaum and Lisa Mirabile.

The topic meetings were well run and all took place at New TV so they would be accessible to all. Thank you to Anne Borg, Carol Ann Shea and Linda Morrison for managing the planning and logistics of these meetings.

Sharon Stout and Sharyn Roberts were so successful last year with fundraising that we did not need to raise funds this year. Next year, we will be running a fund raiser to celebrate our 75th year as a League. So keep an eye out for upcoming planning information about the event. I hope that you will join us to organize the festivities.

I want to acknowledge that Sharyn Roberts is a strong leader. When she takes on a task, it is always accomplished without fanfare, on time and with great passion and care. She pulled together a terrific presentation for candidates in last fall's election, ran voter registration efforts, drove people to the polls, shopped for supplies, dealt with equipment, and always helped setting and cleaning up for events and parties. Most importantly, she is the holder of the League's banner! Sharyn also helped me get the fall event organized at the JCC with Governor Madeline Kunin, Robin Young, Senators Creem and Walsh, and Representative Chang-Diaz. I want to thank her for her continued commitment to the League and tell you how pleased that we are to have her daughter Tami join us Treasurer next year.

I feel so privileged to have worked with our members this year. I also wanted to let you know that I look forward to working with you this coming year as we tackle the many challenges Newton faces. Know too, that the board and I have discussed and committed ourselves to drafting an operations manual that the next generations of leadership can reference as they join us in the work we do. The good news is that the national and state Leagues have written much of the policies and best practices for us although we know that their work is not complete. We will take what exists and add the missing parts to our manual. Once this is done, we will present it to members for input and to develop consensus

on what the appropriate Newton League procedures should be. The final version of this manual will be posted on our web site. I hope you will join me in this effort.

If I have not mentioned your name already, know that I am deeply grateful to you for supporting of the League and our mission. Every member should congratulate themselves for being part of an organization that is so well respected both here in Newton and nationwide.

Finally, we should be proud of all of our actions as we continue to act with trust, integrity and professionalism; operate in an open and effective manner to meet the needs of those we serve, both members and the public. We will take the initiative in seeking diversity in membership and we will acknowledge our heritage as we seek our path to the future. ♦

CPC Update

by Priscilla Leith

The Community Preservation Committee held a regular meeting on April 15. The agenda included a discussion of the work of the city Law Department on CPC issues as well as revisions to two of this year's projects.

Law Department

Last April, a number of questions were raised about policies and procedures regarding the Newton Law Department's charges to the CPC line item. At this meeting, Dan Funk, the city solicitor, presented documents showing charges for last several years, as well as a list of current active projects with the hours the Law Department has worked on them. There is now \$30,000 available per year for specific projects that have been approved by the CPC and the Board of Aldermen, as well as another "administrative account" of \$30,000 a year for projects not yet approved or already over the approved limit, or general CPC legal work that can't come out of a specific project.

Project Updates

Warren House: Proponent is NCDF (Newton Community Development Foundation). The Community Preservation Committee voted to increase the budget for Warren house by \$1,500, due to lengthy and complex ground lease work, was approved. Warren House is now being recommended by the CPC to the Board of Aldermen for approval in the historic resources category at a cost of \$1.249M.

192 Lexington St.: This project for community housing falls under state 40B affordable housing regulations. The developer is Stockard Engler Brigham (SEB). SEB pro-

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Cash in the Trash II, continued from page 3

es, Daley said it was a discussion for the Board of Aldermen, not for city managers.

A manager of the Concord trash system, which is pay-as-you-throw, wondered if residents would bother to recycle if it meant having to wheel two half-full barrels to the curb. She suggested smaller barrels instead. Daley said that politically, the larger size was more feasible, although he admitted a smaller barrel would have been preferable environmentally and fiscally. Another questioner asked about the carbon footprint of the new auto system. Daley said that because there was less time spent idling at the curb waiting for multiple bags and barrels to be thrown in, this program should be more fuel efficient. Dutt added that with more recycling, there would be a lower carbon footprint that way also.

Brooke Lipsitt concluded the program by noting that the city had come a long way in the six months since the first Cash in the Trash forum. She said it was also clear that Newton would adopt some form of pay-as-you-throw. In this regard, she said, Newton was not alone, since every city and town in Massachusetts faced similar fiscal issues and would probably adopt some kind of pay-per-bag system. She urged those in attendance to talk with their neighbors about what they had learned and to discuss the kind of PAYT system that Newton should adopt. ♦

Critical Choices, continued from page 4

that they recommended either spending more money to maintain, or selling in order to reduce the maintenance burden.

After an initial presentation, the audience divided into groups to discuss four different approaches to meeting this goal: raising taxes; reducing spending; setting priorities; and planning. Many said that all four would be needed to address a problem of this magnitude, but a consensus quickly emerged that a "trust deficit" also exists in the city following the new Newton North High School process. A lack of transparency in the budgeting process and poor communication both within the government and between government and residents are central to this deficit, many said.

One working group declared the city needs a capital budgeting process and capital assets manager; another suggested the city start a series of debt exclusion overrides, starting with small projects like the fire houses, and execute the projects well in order to build the trust needed for the bigger projects that lie ahead.

One of the critical deficits the CAG identified was the lack of long-term vision in the budgeting process. "Newton is a city without goals," said Malcolm Salter, chairman of the CAG. This further exacerbates a budgeting process that is fragmented and without priorities.

CPC Update, continued from page 6

poses to build 10 three-bedroom units on a 49,500-square-foot site off Lexington Street and Albert Road bordering the Burr School field. The project, which is slated to receive additional funding from HOME (Newton Home Investment Partnership Program) and CDBG (Community Development Block Grant), would provide six units at 75% of the area median income and the remaining four at 95%. The site poses some geotechnical concerns, as it borders the swampy area that was filled to create Burr Field, and indeed soil tests have already shown that parts of the lot will require piers rather than ordinary foundations, which has already increased the project's projected cost. Neighbors who attended a March 26th meeting about the project also raised a number of concerns about traffic on both Lexington St. and Albert Road as well as concerns about the density of the proposal. A motion to approve \$2.046M in CPA funds (including \$5,000 for the Law Dept) for this project passed by a 6 to 1 vote.

Coming Up

The next CPC meeting will be held on May 20. The next meeting of the aldermanic Community Preservation Committee to discuss CPC recommendations will be held on May 26. ♦

Another idea that seemed to have traction was to increase borrowing beyond the current ceiling of 3 percent of the operating budget. Participants also felt the city needed to get a better idea of the current state of its capital inventory and to assess how well those assets are used. Selling or leasing some of those assets was also a common theme.

Other suggestions included taking advantage of residents' expertise; using the plans already on city shelves; taking advantage of the recession by locking in low bids now; creating more equity in the operating budget between schools and city functions (now at almost 60-40), and using the funds cut for capital purposes; advocating for more commercial development; and selling naming rights for various buildings and other fundraising.

Ruthanne Fuller, vice-chairwoman of the CAG, suggested that the city might need an annual update on what capital needs are not being addressed in the current budget, much like the budget is now required to disclose post-retirement benefit liabilities.

Malcolm Salter summed up the forum, saying he heard two big themes: that communicating the trade-offs and priorities in spending are important, and that trust is a fundamental problem. "You can't get people to invest unless they believe their money will be well-managed," he said. "The capital budgeting process is broken, and thus so are the budget outcomes." ♦

LWVN CALENDAR

MAY

29th Fri., 9:30 am, Environmental Committee, Lucia Dolan's house

29-30th Fri & Sat., **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.

25th Thurs., 7:00 pm, Board Meeting, Terry Yoffie's house.

26th Fri., 9:30, Environmental Committee, Lucia Dolan's house.

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

Welcome!

New member Alison Leary Mooradian, 192 Chapel Street.

League of Women Voters of Newton

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