Land Use Positions Review

by Andrea Kelley, Chair, Land Use Positions Review Committee

The Newton League is reviewing its current positions that relate to land use. Many of these positions have not been updated in years (one immediate recommendation is to date the positions in the Handbook so we all know when they were last set).

Newton is reaching a near built-out situation, and current LWVN positions do not reflect “best practices” in planning, particularly concerning zoning ordinances, mixed use, all incomes of housing, transit-oriented, and sustainable design. In order for the League to be in a strong position for advocating and lobbying for policies and projects that will come before Newton in the very near future, it is crucial that we keep our positions up to date.

A review committee is in place and met on February 4, 2010 to begin the review process. Positions that are being looked at include: Housing, Recreation and Open Space, Land Use: Zoning, and Planning in the Community, City Government- Charter, Support a Comprehensive Plan. Some of the possible issues that LWVN may want to consider updating and/or studying are the inclusion of mixed use, zoning reform, supporting implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, and sustainable development.

The Review Committee has met once, and is pursuing review through research, checking local, state and national positions, researching current planning and zoning methods nationally, talking with related professionals and elected officials. The group will meet again before bringing its recommendations to the LWVN Board, Local Program Planning, and Annual Meeting.

The review committee plans to bring its recommendations to Local Program Planning in March. Any suggested position changes and/or studies for more in-depth review and consensus will be brought to the Annual Meeting on May 27 for a vote by the entire membership.

If you have interest, questions or input, please contact the Land Use Positions Review Committee Chair Andrea Kelley at rtcdesign@aol.com. Committee members are: Andrea Kelley-Chair, Priscilla Leith, Carol Ann Shea, Chris Steele, John Sisson, Leslie Burg, Matt Cuddy and AnnaMaria Abernathy. The committee welcomes your suggestions and involvement.

LWVN Supports Accessory Apartment Ordinance

LWVN Statement of Support for the Proposed Amendments to Newton’s Accessory Apartment Ordinance (#164-09) Public Hearing -- February 22, 2010

by Leslie Burg

Newton’s League of Women Voters has long supported the creation of accessory apartments within established homes. They are in keeping with explicitly stated Land Use, Zoning, and Housing positions taken by the League and we recognize the many benefits they can provide to our community. These “in-law apartments,” as they are sometimes called, are often affordable to lower and moderate-income families. As such, they increase the stock of affordable housing in the City, an outcome that aligns with our national, state, and local support for policies “to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.”

Newton’s Accessory Apartment Ordinance has been in place for many years with very few takers. And the 2006 Accessory Apartment Incentive Plan, designed especially to provide homeowners assistance with creating an affordable accessory apartment, has not succeeded either. Over 350 residents expressed interest in creating an accessory apartment using the program, but ultimately none participated and no units were added.

The Community Living Network, which administered the program, recorded and tallied the reasons why none of those ex-
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2009-2010

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To receive an audio version of this Newsletter, call Terry Yoffie at 617-965-1796.

National Program Planning Update
by Anne Borg

This year there were a number of national program proposals about issues ranging from education to election systems to fiscal policy. After input from members, the LWVN Board of Directors voted on February 23, 2010 to recommend that LWVUS adopt a new study, under the position heading: Social Policy.

The recommended proposal is: "To study the role of the federal government in public education, with a focus on (1) the basic goals of public education, (2) the role of the federal government in education policy making, (3) the relationship between national, state, and local levels of education governance, including funding, and (4) the development of common standards. PURPOSE: To establish national League positions that would enable the League of Women Voters to review, consider, evaluate and advocate for or against federal education legislation; to advocate on issues related to what the federal role in public education should be; and to join in coalition with other national organizations that speak out on issues of public education."

We will update you in a future newsletter whether this study was recommended by the LWVUS Board for adoption at National Convention, June 11-15, 2010, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Thank you to everyone who participated in National Program Planning this year.

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March, 2010

Dear League Members,

Thanks to all who joined us on February 28 to welcome new and prospective members and to celebrate 90 years of LWV US. Many thanks as well to Anne and Doug Borg for opening their beautiful home to us and hosting such a lovely event. Although it’s been 90 years, the U.S. League is alive, healthy, and very busy doing what the League does best in Newton. We owe our remarkable energy and success to the efforts of our dedicated members whom I personally thank for working creatively and hard. I have enjoyed every single minute of my work with you and look forward to our continued efforts helping the city.

This Month at the League

I invite all members to attend our upcoming events. This month, we will focus on completing our local program plan for action next year. Please join us to review what League committee members are proposing. Two dates are planned, the first on March 10 at 11:30 am at NewTV and the second in the evening on March 17 at 7:00 pm, also at NewTV. The final local program plan will be distributed to members so they can vote on it at our annual meeting on May 27, 2010. Our next monthly board meeting will be March 23 at 7:00pm. Please check our calendar for the location at www.lwvnewton.org. The Education Committee will host Alderman Ruthanne Fuller March 24 as she reviews the CAG study report on education at 7:30pm at Gail Glick’s home.

We completed our biennial national program planning for 2010-2012 at the February board meeting by voting to support a proposed study of League positions on education especially with attention to the federal government’s involvement. National League members have noted that our national education positions need to be reviewed in light of many changes that have occurred in education. Attendance at the national convention in June will allow you to watch and participate in League democracy as you support or oppose the program platforms. If you would like to attend the national convention in Atlanta, Georgia from June 11 - June 15, 2010, we have some funding to support our delegates (we will have three voting delegates). Please let me know at tsyof fie@yahoo.com.

Our Continued Commitment to the Environment

The League’s Environmental Issues Committee through its subcommittee on Snow continues to answer questions that the Board of Aldermen Public Safety and Transportation Committee raised in January. The aldermen would like the snow subcommittee to research their questions before we move ahead on a residential sidewalk snow clearing ordinance. Aldermen Vicki Danberg will summarize our findings to date before the Public Safety Committee Wednesday March 3. We encourage those of you who support our work on the city’s sidewalk snow clearing problems to join us at the meeting at 7:45pm.

As many members know, the League has supported an ordinance for snow clearing for all sidewalks as one of our Environmental positions for almost twenty years. We have set as a goal to move a residential sidewalk snow clearing ordinance through the Board this year. We believe that all Newton citizens should be able to use our city’s sidewalks twelve months a year whether for work, school, pleasure, religious observance or health. This goal cannot be accomplished without residents pitching in to dig out.

I am pleased that the League highlighted snow in its January and February television shows on NewTV. You can see the series on the government channel. Look for the “Newton Legislative Roundtable”, “Snow Management I and II” shows on NewTV’s schedule. To learn more, see “Digging Out” in this newsletter. Finally, please remember to contact your aldermen about passing a residential sidewalk snow clearing ordinance and to clear your own sidewalks.

I am also pleased to announce that the state League has started a restudy of state transportation positions. The Newton League is well represented by Deb Crossley, Lucia Dolan, Joyce Moss, and me. We are joined by highly skilled members from Needham, Concord-Carlisle, Belmont, Boston, Haverhill, and Waltham. We plan a panel that will introduce the restudy and the topic of transportation focusing on legislation, operations and policy at the annual “Day on the Hill” on April 28 at the State House.

President’s Meeting with the Mayor

Mayor Setti Warren and I met to review the League’s thoughts and wishes for his new administration. The

Continued on page 4
pressing interest participated. The five proposed amendments to the Ordinance (petition #164-09) were crafted expressly with the intent of easing the restrictions that homeowners found so onerous they decided not to participate in the program.

Docketed as a separate item is the request for a study of building lot size and dimensional requirements for accessory apartments. While the five proposed amendments will address some of the obstacles to creating accessory apartments, the dimensional requirements have also proven to be a major impediment to many homeowners. We recognize that further study and recommendations by the Planning Department are needed to ensure that changes in the lot and building size requirements will promote the creation of accessory apartments where appropriate, consistent with Newton’s Comprehensive Plan, which was approved by the Board of Aldermen in November 2007. Therefore, we strongly urge that such a study be undertaken.

The League believes that making the Accessory Apartment ordinance less restrictive and more flexible will encourage interested homeowners to create more affordable, accessory units in the City. In addition to affordability, such units allow homeowners who wish to, to downsize while remaining in their homes. They also provide housing for a population that is aging and often comprises smaller and more diverse households, and do so without the expense, environmental impacts and increased density that new construction can cause. The increased income a homeowner can realize by renting an accessory apartment can help defray house maintenance costs and permit her to “age in place”. It can also assist with the upkeep of an historic home.

Finally, we hope that passage of these amendments provides incentives for homeowners of currently illegal accessory units, of which the Planning Department estimates there are 1000 to 1500 in the City, to legalize them and be certain they meet safety, health, and building codes. The recent fire in another local community that unfortunately took two lives occurred in just such an illegal accessory apartment.

For all these reasons, Newton’s League of Women Voters strongly supports the five proposed amendments to the Accessory Apartment Ordinance, detailed in docket item #164-09, and urges the Zoning and Planning Committee, the Planning and Development Board, and the Board of Aldermen to approve them in a timely fashion.

ideas we discussed centered on operations, long term strategy, finance, governance and communications. He agreed with most of our ideas and was very welcoming. I want to extend my appreciation to the Mayor for meeting with me and I look forward to our working together on city issues over the next four years.

**Nominations for Next Year’s Board**

The Nominating Committee continues its work to draft a slate for next year’s board. If you are interested in serving on the board or would like to support someone who is interested, please contact the chair, Andrea Kozinetz at info@lwvnewton.org.

**Newton Hosts the State League’s Council Meeting**

Lasell College, at no charge, will host the state League on May 22 from 11am - 7pm for Council. Council is held in the year between conventions approximately twelve months after the preceding convention to review the state League’s annual budget, report on program and offer several panels that are being organized around the theme “Make a Difference.” The day will close with a cocktail party to celebrate our 90th birthday. I hope you will join us.

Respectfully,

Terry Yoffie
President, League of Women Voters Newton

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**LWVMA Annual Day on the Hill**

“Getting Around in Massachusetts”

**Wednesday, April 28, 2010**

9:00 am - 2:00 pm

All LWVN members are welcome. To sign up contact Sharyn Roberts, 617-969-9588 or sharyn@neovana.com.

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**Welcome**

**New Members**

John Sisson and Laura Rutherford, Newton Centre
By the Snow Committee

Working with other organizations and the Aldermen, the League’s Environmental Issues Committee “goes to the pavement” on winter pedestrian safety.

Since the January 7 meeting of the aldermanic Public Safety and Transportation Committee, when a proposal for a residential sidewalk snow shoveling ordinance was nearly killed, League members and representatives of other interested organizations have been meeting weekly to address objections aldermen raised to the ordinance.

Because pedestrians—particularly children and the disabled—need to be able to walk safely in all seasons, the League has supported a sidewalk snow clearing ordinance for residents for at least 20 years.

Our Environmental Issues Committee called officials in more than 30 surrounding communities to determine which of them required residents to shovel sidewalks. We asked officials in the 11 communities that did about their snow clearing ordinance. We gathered information about the laws’ effectiveness, their enforceability and liability, to answer some of the concerns we heard from aldermen.

To make sure the city’s plowing routes around schools met the safety needs of walking children, Safe Routes to School coordinated the Parent Teacher Organizations and principals to examine these routes. SRTS is working with the League, the Bike and Pedestrian Task Force, and the Mayor’s Committee for People with Disabilities on sidewalk snow issues. We have dubbed ourselves Safe Sidewalks.

Safe Sidewalks members have generated dozens of letters to the editor and to aldermen, put notices in PTO and Newton organizations’ newsletters encouraging sidewalk clearance, run two television programs about snow on NewTV, and compiled a series of choices for aldermen in crafting a new ordinance. We have recommended that the new ordinance, as well as the current one prohibiting the dumping of snow onto sidewalks, be written so that more departments can enforce it. Currently, only the police can.

Safe Sidewalks is working closely with Alderman Vicki Danberg and her Snow Committee (now Ald. Deb Crossley, Ald. Greer Tan Swiston and Ald. John Rice, Terry Yoffie for the League, Alicia Bowman for SRTS, DPW Commissioner Tom Daley, Parks and Recreation Acting Commissioner Bob DeRubeis, Law Department Acting Solicitor Marie Lawlor, Aaron Goldman from the Mayor’s office, private contractor Phil Mastrioanni and Police Captain Chris Marzilli), both to get information and to pass it along to the full Board.

Among other things, the Snow Committee has learned that the city uses 94 private contractors to clear side streets (the DPW does major streets and all sidewalks except those that the Parks and Recreation department clears) and it has been working with the DPW to eliminate the private contractors’ practice of leaving snow mountains on Newton’s corners and curb cuts.

One of our Safe Sidewalks members, attorney Maria Sullivan, examined the city plowing contract and made suggestions, which Ald. Danberg has sent to the Law Department, on how it could be made more effective.

Another member, Maryan Amaral, created a blog highlighting the snow mountains dumped into curb cuts around town. The DPW has been very responsive in removing these once she’s brought them to their attention.

Ald. Danberg has passed along our suggestions for the new ordinance to the law department. As far as liability, we are awaiting a Supreme Judicial Court decision that deals with snow and ice and property owner liability before drafting a residential sidewalk proposal for Newton. We want to ensure that Newton’s ordinance will pass legal muster.

We have drafted an educational brochure, which DPW Commissioner Tom Daley has graciously agreed to send out with city water bills in the fall. Acting City Solicitor Lawlor is reviewing the brochure language which explains the snow ordinances and outlines the city’s responsibilities.

In the spring, Safe Sidewalks and the Snow Committee will meet with neighborhood groups to talk about pedestrian safety and the sidewalk ordinance. We hope that by September, our Board of Aldermen will have passed a new residential ordinance and that our job will consist of helping to publicize the benefits and responsibilities of the new law. Perhaps next winter everyone, including children, commuters, and people with disabilities, will be able to walk safely on the sidewalks of Newton.

Members of the Snow Committee include AnnaMaria Abernathy, Maryan Amaral, John Bliss, Alicia Bowman, Lucia Dolan, Ald. Vicki Danburg, Bev Droz, Sue Flicop, Rhanna Kidwell, Alison Leary, Sharyn Roberts, and Terry Yoffie.
League of Women Voters of Newton  
P.O. Box 610207  
Newton, MA 02461
617-964-0014

Re: Water and Sewer Rates  
Lisle Baker, President, Board of Aldermen  
Newton City Hall  
1000 Commonwealth Ave  
Newton Centre, MA 02459

December, 2009

Dear President Baker, Members of the Board:

Our city water and sewer rates support the operation of our quality water service and sewage treatment, but also pay for necessary upkeep of and the elimination of cross connections in many miles of ageing sewer pipes.

Raising the rates becomes necessary as more businesses and residents institute environmentally and economically sound water conservation measures. These are good for the Quabbin watershed, and preserve a vital resource.

Regular improvements to the system are critical to the environment and Newton’s bottom line: Regular repair and replacement of sewer lines curbs the infiltration of ground water. More that half of the flow from Newton's sewer system is attributed to ground water leaking into older pipes. This not only lowers the groundwater levels, it also increases Newton's share of MWRA sewer charges. Our water & sewer fees, therefore, should be sufficient to cover the administration, maintenance and capital improvements to the city’s systems.

The League of Women Voters of Newton encourages the executive department and the Board of Aldermen to set water and sewer rates high enough to fully fund this service.

Yours,

Terry Yoffie  
President
We have scheduled two meetings for this year’s Local Program Planning (LPP); both meetings will take place in the Conference Room at NewTV, 23 Needham Street, Newton Highlands. The first meeting will be on **Wednesday, March 10, from 11:30am-1:30pm (brown bag lunches welcome)**, and the second meeting will be on **Wednesday, March 17, from 7:00-9:00pm (coffee and dessert will be served)**. All members are invited to one or both meetings. At these two meetings, members plan for Newton’s 2010-2011 program. The League uses the word “program” in a very specific way. According to the **Glossary of League Lingo** (see [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)), program consists of “selected governmental issues chosen by members at the local, state and national levels for study and action.”

At either meeting, you’ll be able to learn about what we have been working on this year and recommend ideas and actions you would like to see the League adopt for next year’s program. Please bring your ideas to present them to the group. If you would like a better understanding of how to present your proposal, please contact Anne Borg ([program@lwvnewton.org](mailto:program@lwvnewton.org)).

### Our Approach to Program and Action

League program arises from the suggestions of members. At every level of the League, the board of directors is responsible for reviewing and discussing these suggestions, formulating them in appropriate language, and recommending all or some of them for adoption according to procedures specified in the bylaws (the LWVN bylaws appear in your Member Handbook on pages 45-46 and are on our website at [www.lwvnewton.org/documents/bylaws.php](http://www.lwvnewton.org/documents/bylaws.php)).

A local League’s proposed program is presented for approval by members at its annual meeting (this year the LWVN’s will be on May 27, 2010). In the course of discussions about the coming year’s program, members often give suggestions to the board on scope of inquiry, timing, emphasis, and ways to handle the study and/or action phases for their area of interest.

The technique currently most often used in the League for reaching member agreement is consensus. Again, the League uses the word “consensus” in a very specific way: consensus is the “collective opinion of a substantial number of League members, representative of the membership as a whole, after objective study of an issue.” Consensus is not a simple majority, nor is it unanimity; rather it is the overall sense of the group as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions, whether in a meeting of the full membership or a series of smaller discussion meetings. Consensus will be the method used at our March program discussion meetings.

If a suggestion for program falls under an existing position, that suggestion can simply be considered by the board and voted on at the annual meeting, and action can be taken as appropriate. However, if the suggestion involves a new issue that does not fit under an existing position, members must first agree in broad terms about that issue; in “League Lingo,” the membership must first adopt an appropriate position.

It is essential that members have an opportunity to become educated before making a decision about adopting a new position. This is what makes subsequent League action on that issue uniquely credible and respected. Therefore, the League undertakes a study before considering a new position. During this study, members have an opportunity to examine the facts and key points pro and con, to discuss the political realities of action, and to contribute ideas for the board to consider when it formulates an action strategy after a position is reached.

Any member who introduces a particular program and/or proposal contemplating action on a community issue should consider the following:

- Does the League have an existing position that supports the proposed action?
- Do members understand and would they agree with the proposed action?
- Is it a priority for the League?
- Does the League have a unique role to play or would the League’s assets (time and money) be better spent on other activities?
- Does it have some chance of success or make an important statement for the League?
- Are other organizations or a coalition already working on the issue?
- What action techniques would be most effective?
- How will the League deal with controversy?
- How can members be involved in the proposed action?
- What kind of community involvement would best support the League’s efforts?

Again, if you would like examples of how to prepare a proposal or would like us to review what you have prepared, please contact Anne Borg ([program@lwvnewton.org](mailto:program@lwvnewton.org)).
Community Preservation Update

by the CPC Committee

As we have for at least the last five years, League readers reviewed the applications for the city’s Community Preservation Act funds—about $4 million this year, after debt service, and shrinking because of the demands on the state matching funds.

This year, given these tight resources, we did not recommend any of the proposals, but, as usual, raised questions and concerns where appropriate. Our full description, comments and more can be found on our website www.lwvnewton.org. For space reasons, we will not include the full texts here.

Since the November 18, 2009 public presentation of the grant requests, at which AnnaMaria Abernathy and Priscilla Leith read our comments, the Community Preservation Committee has voted on several of the requests:

- **Angino Farm**: Interior renovation of the barn: $568,000 requested in Community Preservation funds (total $798,000) to restore the historic barn’s interior, adding a demonstration kitchen, two bathrooms, an elevator and other full-access accommodations, heat, insulation, etc. Our readers raised questions about the scope and financial sustainability of the proposed educational programs. In January, the CPC approved the application, and at its February 18 meeting the aldermanic Committee on Community Preservation (CCP) did also. Still pending are approvals from two more aldermanic committees and then a final vote from the full board.

- **City Archives** (Combined): $36,544.75 from CPA ($45,221 total) to protect, preserve and digitize materials that document Newton’s cultural, governmental and social history through a time when it went from an agricultural to an industrial suburb of Boston. The archive material, including maps, photographs, directories and documents, is located in City Hall, the Library and at Jackson Homestead, and the effort is a collaboration of several entities. Before the CPC’s January working session, the applicants provided considerable supplemental information, some of it requested by our readers, who correctly sensed that the funds requested couldn’t possibly cover the entirety of the city’s collections. The applicants’ responses can now be viewed at the CPC’s website, which is accessed via the city website. The CPC has approved this application, as has the CCP. It now needs approval from the Finance Committee and the full board.

- **Veteran House**: $375,000 of $950,000 total to purchase and renovate an Auburndale 2-family home for affordable housing, including multiple services provided on-site by outside agencies with preference for one-parent families headed by a veteran. Our questions about demand for such housing, as well as about the possibility of making the home more accessible were addressed in December and February. On Feb. 24, the CPC voted to fund the project. It now joins the Historic Newton projects on the agenda of the aldermanic Committee on Community Preservation.

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2010-2012 Member Handbook Coming Soon

**Yellow Pages Sponsors Wanted!**

Handbook sponsorships will be our main fundraiser for 2010. If you know a business that might like to be a sponsor, please let them know about the opportunity! A solicitation letter and form are available on our website, at www.lwvnewton.org.
I'd like to learn more about the LWVN: please send me information by mail and/or have a member of the Newton League contact me.

☐ I would like to make a donation to the LWVN. My check for $___________ is enclosed.

☐ I would like to join the LWVN as indicated below.

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MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

☐ Individual - $55
☐ Household (2 members) - $75
☐ Student Membership - $25
☐ Sustaining Membership - $75
☐ Supporting Membership - $100

Please note: financial assistance is available if the membership fee would pose a financial burden. Contact the treasurer (treasurer@lwvnewton.org) if you would like assistance with the fee. Dues for membership and contributions to the LWV Newton are not deductible for tax purposes. Tax-deductible contributions to LWVUS Educational Fund may be made; please mail c/o LWVN.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR JOINING MEMBERS

☐ I’ll read the newsletter online to save paper and money – just email me when it is published.

☐ Please do not share my email address with the State and National Leagues.

I’m particularly interested in:

Specific Topics/Committees
☐ Education
☐ Environmental Issues
☐ Housing
☐ CPC Readers
☐ Municipal Finance
☐ Charter Review
☐ Election Commission

League Outreach/Education
☐ Observer Corps*
☐ Topic Meetings
☐ Legislative Roundtable
☐ Voters Service
☐ Voter Registration
☐ Drive voters to the polls
☐ Candidates’ Nights

LWVN Functions
☐ League Leadership
☐ Communications
☐ Membership
☐ Fundraising
☐ Events
☐ Publicity

Please indicate other interests: __________________________________________________________

*Observers represent the League as impartial listeners and note takers at municipal meetings. Training is provided.

Please mail your completed form and either mail your check (payable to “LWVN”) to the address below.

Treasurer, League of Women Voters Newton
PO Box 610207 Newton, MA 02461
League of Women Voters of Newton

P O Box 610207
Newton, MA 02461
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