

Newsletter

Volume 17, Issue 2

visit us online at www.lwvnewton.org

March 2011

Land Use Study: Consensus Meetings

There are several large scale projects on the drawing boards for future development in Newton, but the LWVN does not have sufficient positions with which to review, support or oppose them. Our Land Use-related positions are outdated, and spread out into many various topic areas. We hope these consensus meetings will help us move our positions into current planning practices and keep us able to respond to projects, both pro- and re-actively.

There are four Consensus Questions:

1. What types of housing should be available in Newton?
2. How can Newton balance a mix of business and residential, with economic development?
3. What makes a development project “sustainable”, and how important is this?
4. What are some effective ways to regulate land use & development through zoning?

The study committee believes there are four priority areas to address. They are listed here, along with some ideas for discussion within each category.

- **Housing-** currently the LWVN positions do no mention the goal of providing a full spectrum/diversity of housing types: affordable, rental, home ownership, single and multiple families, SRO's, residential included in retail and business, located near transit, services, infrastructure, accessibility for people of all abilities.
- **Fiscal Policy-** missing in current LWVN positions are any explicit references to economic development and zoning techniques such as density bonus, use of business

districts, how can the City can be pro-active v. reactive, parking options to encourage business, pedestrian-friendly areas in business districts.

- **Sustainability-** this is a term that refers to a development that may include a concentration of development/density, mixed uses, protection and restoration of environment and natural resources, respect for the existing context, permeability to surroundings, reduction of waste and pollution, increase in quantity, quality and access to open spaces and recreation, near transportation options, job and business opportunities, promote clean energy, plan regionally for multi-community benefits. Are these desirable in Newton?
- **Zoning-** should Newton update its zoning ordinances? How to be sensitive to context; i.e., Wells Avenue is not Needham Street is not Newton Centre: look at the parking code and policies such as shared parking, encourage regional coordination, more support for infrastructure maintenance, stormwater management, form-based codes, look at other examples currently being used in communities.

Are these ideas or goals the Newton League will endorse? What else is missing? Come share your thoughts and learn more.

Andrea Kelley, Chair. Committee Members: Lisle Baker, Leslie Burg, Deb Crossley, Matt Cuddy, Carol Ann Shea, John Sisson, Chris Steele.

Land Use Positions: Consensus Meetings

Wednesday, March 23, 11:30am-1:30pm AND Thursday, March 24, 7:00-9:00pm

NewTV Conference Room, 23 Needham St, Newton Highlands

All members are invited to attend one or both meetings. Brown bag lunches or dinners welcome; coffee and dessert will be served. For more information, email info@lwvnewton.org.

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2010-2011

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For 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.

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Update on Mayor's
Transportation Advisory Committee

Last Spring Mayor Warren formed a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) as recommended by Newton's Comprehensive Plan (a plan many League members both worked to create and lobbied to pass). TAC's goal is to recommend policies, actions and strategies for transportation concerns and long-range planning.

In September the TAC Safety Subcommittee released recommendations for creating a culture safety in Newton. Among the recommendations – create a user-friendly, transparent process for citizen complaints on transportation-safety issues with feedback on the resolution; create specific policies regarding roadway marking (painting) to maximize safety; prioritize safety over traffic flow when retiming traffic lights; and create an education campaign on the new Safe Driving Law.

Currently the TAC has five subgroups – parking; youth and senior travel; urban fabric; outreach and engagement; and complete streets. These subgroups are researching past transportation studies, police accident reports, and transportation policies of other cities to reach consensus on further recommendations for the Mayor.

To learn more about TAC and read the complete report of safety recommendations, visit the TAC page on the City's website. www.newtonma.gov/Planning/TAC.

The Archives Committee needs board minutes from the early 1970's, when Margaret Smith and Ellen Lipson were LWVN Presidents. Contact Ann Grantham for pick-up, at agrnt46@gmail.com.

Letter from the Leadership

We look forward to the coming spring weather, and the launching of an exciting Municipal Election year. If you go by the Elections Commission office in City Hall, you will find a “Save the Date” flier being handed to everyone who comes to pick up a candidate’s packet. The LWVN and the Newton Election Commission are co-sponsoring the “Don't Just Stand There...RUN!” workshop the evening of April 27, 2011. (See more info about this elsewhere in this newsletter.)

The Land Use Review study will be presenting and seeking Consensus on Wednesday, March 23, 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM and again the evening of March 24, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM – both meetings to be held at NewTV. Be sure to come and participate at either – or both – meetings. Much work and thought have gone into reviewing the League positions on key issues and topics, and a large turnout would be an important next step in this process.

We completed our Local Planning process, contributed to the LWVMA planning, and had several

participants in the Moderator training workshop held recently. In addition, our Nominating Committee has launched its activities, preparing for the June 2, 2011, annual meeting. Every committee is writing up the work done since the last annual meeting, preparatory to the creation of the Annual Workbook.

The topic of redistricting (“re-precincting”) as a result of the 2010 census is at the top of many agendas. We still await final numbers for Massachusetts being released, but we will be meeting with State Senator Cindy Creem and Representatives Kay Khan and Ruth Balsler to discuss the issues for Newton the morning of March 17. Please email info@lwvnnewton.org if you are interested in joining us.

Also, mark your calendars for this year's Day on the Hill - April 13.

In League,
Gail, Ellen, Bonnie, and Anne
LWVN Leadership Team
info@lwvnnewton.org

Letter to the Newton Community Preservation Committee

Dear Ms. Grissom and Committee Members:

Please find attached the comments of the League of Women Voters of Newton on the five proposals before you.

You will notice that this year we are only recommending a few projects, again with an eye to the size of the CPA fund as well as to where our efforts would be most needed.

This does not reflect on the worthiness of the projects on which we remain neutral.

Again, we were pleased at the relative completeness and worthiness of the applications—for which we wish to complement the clearly excellent organizational skills of Ms. Ingerson.

Our comments would never be complete without expressing our high esteem for this committee’s work: its consistently thorough and thoughtful deliberations. We take pleasure in seeing the many successful projects that are accumulating around the city.

Sincerely,

Gail Glick
LWVN Leadership Team Spokesperson

Community Preservation Committee: LWVN Recommendations

Architectural Survey 1830-40

Submitted by: Candace Havens, Interim Director of Planning and Development

Cost: \$37,500 from CPA (total \$65,333)

Description: Correct and expand existing partial surveys of Newton's earliest buildings. The end product will guide preservation efforts as well as future decisions about preservation funding. This project expands on a previous plan to update the city's inventory of historic properties built prior to 1830.

LWVN Reviewer Comments/Questions:

Since the passage of the CPA in Newton, the League has asked the CPC to base its decisions on good information and on goals for the future. One of the goals of the CPA is to preserve historic sites—this would create a key tool for doing so. This survey also advances the Comprehensive Plan's goals of developing with history in mind—without this information, the city may inadvertently allow the demolition of historic properties without review. The survey also fits within the city's Preliminary Historic Preservation Plan of 2002, and would be helpful to the Newton Historical Commission.

The application is good, but could use more evidence of community support.

- The amount requested for the pre-1830 survey and the amount requested for the 1830-1840 survey don't quite align. Perhaps the applicants found that the survey was more expensive than when the pre-1830 request was made.
- With an Interim Planning Director and staffing cuts, does the Planning Dept. have the resources to get this done?
- Will the upcoming large budget deficit impact the \$11,133 Planning Dept. match?

Recommendation: neutral—the funding is minimal, but is this a priority project now?

Update: The CPC unanimously approved funding in December 2010. It was unanimously approved by the aldermanic Committee on Community Preservation March 1, and will be heard by the Finance Committee March 14.

Historic Burying Grounds Preservation

Part 2B: Tomb Repair & Conservation

Submitted by: Historic Newton

Locations: Centre & Cotton streets (Ward 7), Cherry & River streets (Ward 3), Winchester St (Ward 5)

Cost: \$614,461 requested from CPA, total \$1,060,133 all prior CPA funding—some educational and volunteer coordination assistance from Historic Newton.

Description: Conserve, repair, stabilize and clean roughly 30 historic tombs; put up historically appropriate ornamental fencing on three burying grounds.

LWVN Reviewer Comments/Questions:

This is exactly the sort of project that the CPA was created to protect under the "Historic Preservation" category. Newton's three old burial grounds have obvious historic importance (having been added to the Federal Register of Historic Places), and clearly have suffered neglect. In addition to offering historic preservation, this project also offers

enhancement of open space which eventually may be useable for passive recreation.

The Comprehensive Plan also supports the preservation of living history in Newton, which this represents.

As in past applications, it does not leverage outside funds, which is regrettable, and we would encourage the applicants to try again—perhaps direct mail solicitation from the many volunteers that they use to maintain the properties on Newton Serves and other weekends.

The plan lacks up-to-date letters of support (most are from 2002), and we hope they will get more current ones, which should not be difficult. An eight-year-old letter of support from the Parks and Recreation Department begs the question of whether the budget cuts of past years changed the department's ability to provide the same services to the Burial Grounds. Is the new commissioner still supportive?

There is also a lack of information on the volunteer support. It would be interesting to know how many volunteers Historic Newton's Burial Grounds Committee has typically been able to recruit for its cleanup activities, for example, or how many actively choose the project during NewtonServes.

In addition, there is no indication of village- or neighborhood-based support. Are there any organizations in any of these three locations that might be supportive (Nightcap, for instance, in West Newton)? What about youth groups looking for service projects (Girl- and Boy-Scouts)?

Most critically in a year of short funding, is whether the project can be prioritized and partially funded this year, perhaps safety elements and anything facing irreparable loss, with desirable but less critical items coming in successive years?

Recommendation: Neutral

Update: Will be heard by the CPC March 16.

61 Pearl Street

Submitted by: Josephine McNeil, CAN-DO

Cost: \$665,000 requested from CPA

Description: Creation of three units of permanently affordable rental housing, out of an existing 4-unit dwelling.

LWVN Reviewer Comments/Questions:

CAN-DO has successfully completed several CPA affordable housing projects in Newton, all of them, like this one, small, in-fill developments. The LWVN supports such developments, which bring the city closer to the 10 percent affordable housing goals of the City and Comprehensive Plan without adding density. It fits with Newton's CPA Plan. The Housing Partnership has also identified a need for smaller 1-2 BR affordable units.

This application has the added environmental benefit of not increasing the foot print of the existing building, merely improving it and making it affordable.

We also applaud the developer for making the ground floor unit wheelchair accessible, and look forward to future developments with accessibility. The site at Pearl St. is relatively flat, which also allows for easier car and wheelchair access. The proposal also addresses a deficit in Newton's housing noted by Newton At Home: the lack of single-floor housing.

The LWVN strongly supports making such developments sustaina-

ble in the long term, and therefore encourage the developer to enhance non-toxic insulation and building envelope sealing beyond building code to Newton's "stretch" code, adding to its CPA request, if necessary. This will not only ensure longer-term affordability, but will save the developer operating costs.

Letters of support and architectural schematic plans will be presented later. A site plan showing the layout of parking and driveway would be helpful.

There is a lot of information on the financials of the organization, but not as much detailed information about the proposed changes. A full explanation of the cost of each of the major architectural elements, and a time-line would make this application much stronger.

Questions:

- Has the developer allowed a large enough percentage for contingencies and management?
- Will there be relocation costs?
- Will there be enough parking on-site for each unit, if so, how many spaces per unit?
- Will children attend the Lincoln-Eliot School?
- Are there other services and amenities within easy walking distance, such as shops, parks/playgrounds, public transit? We'd like to see referenced what services are within 1/2 mile walking distance: school, church/temple, market, bank, park/playground, restaurants, bus stops, etc.

Recommendation: Assuming community support is evidenced in some manner, (understanding that getting neighbor or abutter support of often difficult when creating affordable housing) that the final architecture and site plans showing paved parking area, and the units especially the accessible one are feasible, and other funding sources are identified such as the private bank lender and private foundation grants, recommend that the LWVN support this proposal.

Update: CPC voted unanimously in favor Jan. 19, the aldermanic CCP voted March 1 to hold.

112-116 Dedham Street

Submitted by: Geoffrey and Robert Engler, SEB, LLC

Cost: \$1,400,000 CP funds requested

Description: 16 units of home ownership/condominium housing units, with four being deed-restricted as affordable. All units will be one-floor living, fully handicapped accessible.

LWVN Reviewer Comments/Questions:

This developer has already weathered one CPA process, and we look forward to seeing the resulting housing in Auburndale. This application is remarkably complete and well-done, and includes full references to the city's various plans and goals.

The proposal fits the Newton-CPA goal of expanding community housing, and the Newton Consolidated & Comprehensive plans in that it provides affordable units and more density near transit. It also greatly expands housing for persons with disabilities, and addresses the lack of single-story living noted by Newton At Home. The League's housing positions support "scattered site" affordable housing throughout the city and the mixing of socio-economic groups.

No indication of enhancement of open space.

The site is not as close to restaurants as indicated in the plans, but a

safe and accessible route to the Newton Highlands stop of the Green Line is available via Walnut and Woodcliff, thus avoiding the unpleasant and unsafe intersection of Center at Dedham and crossing two Rt. 9 on/off ramps at the overpass. That said, its proximity to Needham Street will not be much benefit until that street becomes more pedestrian-friendly.

More community outreach and support are needed. The developers have not yet approached the Ward 8 Aldermen. They also plan to meet with the Housing Partnership soon, and have reached out to the Planning and Development Department. Informal conversations with abutters and neighborhood residents have begun. There is a desire from them to preserve the existing barn, which the developers are willing to do. A neighborhood meeting is in the works; neighbors will contact SEB when a time and location has been determined. No letters of support are provided.

Further questions:

- Is there a non-profit partner/organization involved also?
- Are any "support services" being offered for seniors, the frail, or people with mental disabilities, as mentioned in the Consolidated Plan and Comprehensive Plan?
- Is the driveway slope going to be an issue for persons with balance issues, or using wheelchairs or walkers?
- Will any of the ledge need to be blasted in front or will the new drive basically replace the existing one?
- Are any open space/landscaping plans being designed to take advantage of the single-building, basically "cluster" design?
- Where is guest/visitor parking available?
- Is parking adequate?
- Will the barn be renovated, used as shared common space, for what type of activities?
- The building is a single, attached structure with 6 units on the 1st floor plan; to get 16 units in, what is the configuration of the upper two floors?
- The background materials note that this parcel is #112-118 Dedham St, and also that it is #254- are the numbers changing with this proposal?

Recommendation: Recommend support; Newton needs quality 1-2 BR housing, including home ownership options and an affordable component.

Update: Will be heard by the CPC March 16.

Engineering Plan & Map Preservation

Submitted by: Thomas Daley, DPW Commissioner

Cost: \$1,903,000 from CPA

Description: Preserve and digitize the oldest and most fragile engineering maps and plans, provide backup records as part of disaster recovery planning, reduce further deterioration, and allow access to the data through the geographic information system (GIS).

LWVN Reviewer Comments/Questions:

This application furthers a worthy goal—preserving vital historic documents that are particularly critical for maintaining Newton's infrastructure, including crumbling sewer and storm drain pipes. Without them, the city's work of identifying its oldest, particularly underground, structures and maintaining them into the 21st century will be much more difficult. As they are now, they are much-handled and are wearing thin. Further, accessing them is time-consuming and requires an in-person visit. By digitizing these maps, Newton will save on staff

Nominating Committee

*Become active in the League...
Make a difference!*

"I had spent 10 years doing a variety of volunteer jobs. When I joined the League, I was surprised and delighted to find myself learning new and valuable skills not taught elsewhere and absorbing larger amounts of information on a variety of subjects. Every year I feel that the dues I pay are minuscule compared to the education I continue to acquire."

- Anita Capeless

You too can expand your skill set and make a difference to our city, state and country!

What areas appeal to you?

Program

- ❖ Observe, examine and take a stand on issues that affect us all.
- ❖ Work with an updated Land Use Position.
- ❖ Determine topics that need to be highlighted in forums and TV.
- ❖ Become an expert in an area through National and Local studies.

Voters Service

- ❖ Ensure the delivery of fair voter practices.
- ❖ Make sure voters have fair information on all candidates.
- ❖ Look after the voters through registration and rides to polls.

Organization

- ❖ Create opportunities for promoting membership or fundraising.
- ❖ Edit the newsletter or the Handbook. Handle internal communication.
- ❖ Preserve the past with archival skills and current technology.
- ❖ Plan wonderful events for the LWVN 75th Birthday!

What to do?

Contact the members of your Nominating Committee. You can make a difference!

Ann Grantham, Chair, agrant46@gmail.com; Bonnie Carter, bonniehcarter@aol.com; Andreae Downs, adglickman@rcn.com; Ellen Glusman, eglusman@gmail.com; Lynn Scheller, lynnscheller@yahoo.com.

CPC, continued from page 5

time as well as wear-and-tear on historic maps and plans.

The League historically has supported applications that further planning and which provide necessary information for good decision-making. This application seems to qualify. City plans, while not necessarily mentioning these maps & plans, are supported by their existence. Plans for the Burial Grounds, for the preservation of which the CPC has awarded several years of funding, are included in these documents, as are the original plans for the Olmsted-designed Newton Centre Playground. However, the applicants have not made this case here.

At least in the preservation of the physical maps & plans, this application falls under the CPA, and the League has traditionally supported digitizing records-both because it increases public access and because it is fiscally prudent, saving city employee time for other tasks.

The goals seem to be twofold:

1. Maintain public access to the plans & maps for current and future development (a legal requirement)
2. Preserve an "extraordinary collection of one-of-a-kind documents" that traces the history of Newton's development.

Letters of support for this project speak to its importance to the city and its residents, but not to preserving the original documents as an essential part of Newton's history. Such support should be in evidence.

Questions:

- This request seems particularly large in a year of increasingly tight CPA funding. No outside funding-and therefore no leverage-is in evidence. Have the applicants tried to obtain outside grants for this purpose?
- Are the preservation needs noted in goal 2 necessary for digitizing the records?
- Does the city need to preserve all the plans & maps or could a limited number of significant documents be physically preserved?
- Can the applicants stage this project so it is taken in smaller bites?
- Have the applicants looked for outside partners to shoulder some of the expense and labor?
- Should the request for document preservation come from an organization such as Historic Newton?
- Who will be the project manager for this project? Newton's history with the CPA shows that proposals without a manager do not advance quickly.

Recommendation: Raise questions only.

Update: Proponents are holding for results of architecture survey.

Considering Public Office? Interested in How Local Campaigns Work?

Save the Date!

Don't Just Stand There...RUN!

The League of Women Voters of Newton and the Newton Election Commission
Invite Candidates, Campaign Managers, Campaign Treasurers, and Interested Citizens
To a Practical Workshop

How to Run a Campaign for Local Public Office

Wednesday, April 27, 2011

7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Location TBD

The following presentations are planned:

- Jason Tait, Director of Communication and Public Education, Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance, will give an overview of the Campaign and Political Finance Law
- Craig AJ Manseau, Executive Secretary of the Newton Election Commission, will describe local filing requirements
- Other speakers to be announced

*For more information, contact the League of Women Voters of Newton at 617-383-4598
or info@lwnnewton.org, or the Newton Election Commission at 617-796-1350*

Run, Women, Run!

Encouraging Women to Run for Office

Wednesday, March 23, 2011, 4:00 - 6:00 pm

UMass Boston, Room 11B, Healey Library, Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA

Moderator

Dr. Carol Hardy-Fanta, Director, Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy

Panelists

Former Mayor and City Councilor E. Denise Simmons, Cambridge

State Senator Katherine Clark, Middlesex and Essex Districts

Sheriff Andrea Cabral, Suffolk County

State Representative Gloria Fox, Suffolk County

Sponsored by:

The Hispanic Studies Program, UMass Boston

League of Women Voters of Boston

The Women's Studies Program, UMass Boston

The Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy

For more information: www.mccormack.umb.edu/centers/cwppp/RunWomenRun.php

LWVN CALENDAR

MARCH

- 23rd Wed., 11:30am-1:30pm, **Land Use Consensus Meeting**, NewTV, 23 Needham St.
- 24th Thurs., 9:45-noon, **LWVN Archives Morning**, First Baptist Church Basement, Newton Centre.*
- 24th Thurs., 7:00pm-9:00pm, **Land Use Consensus Meeting**, NewTV, 23 Needham St.

APRIL

- 6th Wed., 7:00pm, **LWVN Board meeting**. Bonnie Carter's house.
- 13th Wed., 9am – noon. **Day on the Hill**. For more information, see www.lwvma.org.

April Topic Meeting: To be announced.

**Archives Mornings: Please call Linda Morrison at 617-332-6539 if you are planning to attend.*

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

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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