
League of Women Voters of Newton

Newsletter

Volume 17, Issue 5

visit us online at www.lwvnewton.org

November 2011

LWVN Presents Transportation Forum

Anyone navigating around Newton knows the routine: at some points in the day, moving along our streets becomes extremely slow. Walking is unpleasant as cars and trucks crowd too near to sidewalks and crosswalks and fill in more lanes than actually exist at intersections. Biking is a challenge as drivers come too close or honk at legal behaviors they don't understand, while parked cars obstruct the shoulders. Taking one of the aging Green Line trains can also turn unexpectedly slow, while buses face some of the same obstacles as cars.

And that's just within Newton's borders. Even the tolls on the Mass turnpike don't prevent traffic that can cost you vital minutes on your way into Boston. Venture west on Route 9 some Saturday afternoon and the congestion rivals that just to the north or south on Route 128.

Moreover, Newton's leaders are hoping that further economic development here will bolster the tax base. The Citizens Advisory Group recommended it and some development is part of the city's Comprehensive Plan. This leads us to ask:

- How can any of this happen without the city choking on traffic?
- What kinds of infrastructure designs and policies will encourage alternatives to the single-occupant automobile?
- What constraints and opportunities face the city in implementing these ideas?

The LWVN is launching a two-year study of these and related transportation issues with a forum on Tuesday, November 29, on **The Future of Transportation in Newton** with several experts in transportation:

- Northeastern University Professor **Stephanie Pollack** chaired Newton's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). She will speak about state transportation finance, as well as the recommendations of Newton's TAC.
- **Eric Bourassa**, transportation manager for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), will describe the MAPC's two studies on development and transportation issues along Route 128 and Route 9.
- Director of LivableStreets **Jacqueline Douglas** will explain some of the street and intersection geometry options that could be used in Newton to mitigate congestion and encourage other modes of transportation besides the automobile.
- **Candace Havens**, Newton's Director of Planning, will be on hand after the presentations to help answer Newton-specific questions.

LWVN's own **Priscilla Leith** will moderate.

The LWVN is joined in this forum by co-sponsors Green Decade, Newton Free Library, Newton Conservators, Newton Villages, Safe Routes to School, Bike Newton, Newton Bicycle & Pedestrian Task Force, Newton Economic Development Commission, Citizens for Access, *Newton TAB*, Newton Senior Center, Newton at Home, Newton Disabilities Commission, Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce, NewTV, and the LWVs of Weston, Needham and Wellesley.

We hope you can join us, Tuesday, November 29, at 7:00 pm at the Druker Auditorium, Newton Free Library!

League membership renewal time is here! Please look for your renewal packet in the mail. If you have questions, please contact Ann Grantham at membership@lwvnewton.org.

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2011-2012

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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.

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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Lynn Scheller

Elections Committee

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Ellen Glusman

Environmental Issues

Alison Leary Mooradian

Environmental Issues

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Newsletter & Website

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Topic Meetings

Jo Corro

Voters Service/Citizen Education

Bonnie Carter
Sharyn Roberts

November Topic Meeting

LWVUS Privatization Study

At the 2010 LWVUS Convention, the delegates voted to have two consensus studies for 2010-2012. The first study was the recently completed one on the role of the federal government in public education; the second study is about privatization. The scope of the latter study is: "... to identify those parameters and policy issues to be considered in connection with proposals to transfer federal, state or local government services, assets and/or functions to the private sector. It will review the stated goals and the community impact of such transfers, and identify strategies to ensure transparency, accountability, and preservation of the common good."

In the past several years, many public services, assets, and functions have been outsourced to the private sector; there are many proposals to outsource others. Some of the services considered for privatization include: water, roads and other modes of transportation, infrastructure, fire-fighting services, prisons, library services, education, voters services, military, utilities, and others.

LWVN is looking for co-chairs to organize this study. It is guaranteed to be interesting; this study is very timely and needed. No experience in running a study is necessary; the presidents and board will support the co-chairs in any way that is needed. The November Topic Meeting will be a discussion of the Privatization Study. **Please join us on Thursday, November 17, from 11:30am-1:00pm, at Anne Borg's house.** For more information, or if you are interested in working on the study, please email: info@lwvnewton.org.

Letter from the Presidents

Happy Fall! We hope that everyone was able to find this year's Voters Guide, either online or a printed copy at one of several locations.

This year's candidates' debates were very successful. We thank NewTV and the candidates who participated; the debates were well-produced and the content was very substantive and informative. Special thanks go to Stephen Kessinger, NewTV's new Government Channel Coordinator – the set was fabulous! We also thank the moderators: Liz Blumenthal, LWV Arlington; Debbie Winnick, LWV Needham; and Marcia Hirshberg, LWV Westwood/Walpole. They all did a great job.

We are extremely grateful to Sharyn Roberts and Bonnie Carter, Voters Service co-chairs, who organized the debates, contacted the candidates, wrote the scripts, and were crucial to making the debates run so smoothly.

We would also like to thank the many other Newton League members who helped make the debates such a success: Anne Alvarado, Anne Borg, Doug Borg, Jo Corro, Sue Flicop, Ellen Glusman, Ann Grantham, Andrea Kozinetz, Alison Leary, Priscilla Leith, Tami Roberts, and Lynn Scheller.

LWVUS Education Consensus Study

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Ed Study. We want to especially thank the Ed Study's Newton co-chairs, Jo Corro and Lynn Scheller. In a few short months, Jo and Lynn took a very complicated and comprehensive topic and put together three well-organized and informative meetings, supported by a PowerPoint presentation and other materials that were to-the-point and helped all of us wade through complex topics and terminology. Their work is a model of League work at its best!

LWVUS Privatization Study

At the 2010 LWVUS Convention, the delegates voted to have two consensus studies for 2010-2012. The second study is about privatization. Please see the description of the study on page 1.

LWVN is looking for co-chairs to organize this study. It is guaranteed to be interesting; this study is very timely and needed. No experience in running a study is necessary, the presidents and board will support the co-chairs in any way that is needed. The November Topic Meeting will feature a discussion of the Privatization Study. **Please join us on Thursday, November 17, from 11:30am-1:00pm, at Anne Borg's house.** For more information, please email: info@lwnnewton.org.

LWVN Transportation Forum

Please join us on Tuesday, November 29, at 7:00pm, in the Druker Auditorium at the Newton Free Library for a forum: *The Future of Transportation in Newton: Unclogging Newton's Arteries*.

See the article on the front page for more information.

LWVN Display at Newton Free Library

The next time you visit the Newton Free Library, please visit the display cases in the circulation area. LWVN has a display: **Your Vote Makes a Difference**. It includes interesting information about elections that hinged on one or just a very few votes.

LWVN 2012 Handbook

The 2012 Handbook is being prepared; whom do you know to contact for ads? Please let us know!

LWVN Holiday Party

We are pleased that Historic Newton has very generously allowed us to hold our Holiday Party at the Jackson Homestead. The party will be on Sunday, December 4, from 4:00-6:00pm. Join League members for good company, wine and cheese, and an opportunity to view the exhibit at Jackson Homestead about LWVN's history. We hope that you can join us!

In League,

Anne and Sue
presidents@lwnnewton.org / 617-383-4598

Welcome New Members!

Cecil Coggins | Auburndale * David Rosenbaum | Waban * Chris Steele | Waban

The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education Study

The League's Reason for Being

By Jo Corro

Over thirty-five members and non-members attended the informational session on the education study, *The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education*, on Monday, October 3. This meeting was presented by the co-chairs of the education study, Lynn Scheller and Jo Corro. They provided information on the consensus questions for both *Common Core Standards* and *Equity and Funding* as well as background information so members would be more knowledgeable about the issues and better prepared to participate in the consensus meetings held on October 13. We were honored to have **David Fleishman, Superintendent of the Newton Public Schools, and Ann Koufman, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, as resources for our discussion. Their knowledge contributed greatly to our understanding of these issues as well as how policies affect the classrooms and learning in Newton and nationwide.**

The history of the federal government in education as well as background information on the last 30 years in the development of educational standards and assessments were reviewed. Basic definitions were provided so all would understand the difference between standards, assessments and curriculum as well as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. There was much discussion about the national, not federal, common core and what role the federal government should have in requiring to states adopt these standards, assess students and/or develop a curriculum. Priorities and distribution of educational funding was also addressed.

Since the number of questions and complexity of the content could not be covered in one meeting, two consensus meetings, both on **Thursday, October 13** were held. The first meeting was held during our regular topic meeting time and location, at 11:30 a.m., at the NewTV Conference Room, 23 Needham Street, Newton Highlands. The focus was on Common Core Standard consensus questions and had 15 members in attendance. Jo Corro and Lynn Scheller

welcomed attendees and introduced the format of the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves.

As an ongoing way to increase membership, Ann Grantham provided background on the League of Women Voters and asked Bonnie Carter to "tell her story." Bonnie has been involved in the work of the League for about 40 years - beginning in Geneva, New York and coming to Newton where she has been on and off the Board for many years. All those in attendance were given League brochures and encouraged to tell their friends and neighbors their "League" story and invite them to join the league.

Jo and Lynn served as resources and reviewed the scope of the study process and the current role of the federal government in public education. Prior to discussion of all consensus questions, the League presented arguments for/and opposing the question. Lisa Mirabile was the session's discussion leader/moderator and Andrea Kozinetz was the recorder for both sessions.

The second meeting was held that evening at 7:00 p.m. in the Newton City Hall Cafeteria and was attended by 15 members. The focus was on the Equity and Funding. Andrea Kelley served as the moderator using the same format as the noon meeting.

On Wednesday, October 19, the co-chairs, moderators and recorder reviewed the results of the consensus meetings and prepared a document with the responses as well as comments made by participants. Members expressed a number of concerns about the quality of the questions and recommended that national pre-test the questions before distributing them in the future.

The results were presented at the Board meeting on November 2 for review. They were then submitted to the national League where the responses from local leagues all over the country will be consolidated into a public policy and then used to advocate and influence public policy.

Zoning Reform Group Unveils Draft Report

by Priscilla Leith

The Newton Zoning Reform Group (ZRG), which was created a year ago by the Newton Board of Aldermen to “develop a plan to reform Newton’s zoning code,” released a draft report at a public meeting on November 4. League member and Alderman Deborah Crossley, its chairperson, urges League members to get involved in the process and follow its progress. Other members are staff persons Seth Zeren and Dr. Jennifer Molinsky, Attorney Jason Rosenberg, architect Marc Hershman, former alderman Terry Morris, Judge Peter Kilborn and residential developer Steve Vona. The ZRG’s assignment was “determining long and short-term objectives, identifying funding options, researching best practices of communities that have undergone zoning reform, and identifying potential resources to assist in the process.”¹ Implementation will cost an estimated \$240,000 to \$300,000, which includes using City staff and hiring consultants.

Crossley stated, “Our zoning ordinances are difficult to understand, administer and enforce and have not produced desired outcomes for the City.” The current zoning code is 125 pages long and is not designed for long-range planning or to accommodate new, greener technology.

“We need to restructure and clean up the document, make it user-friendly, clear and consistent and easy to navigate – for citizens, developers and staff,” Crossley continued. When approved by the aldermen, the new code will guide future construction in the City and will conform to the *Comprehensive Plan*. The ZRG proposes that implementation of its plan start next year and fin-

ish by 2015, with the work being done in three phases:

Phase 1. Reorganization and reformatting of the ordinance to make it easier to use, resolve confusing or contradictory passages, and incorporate illustrations and tables;

Phase 2. Comprehensive rewrite of the Zoning Ordinance and revision to the Zoning Map, addressing the themes in Section 3 to better implement the *Comprehensive Plan*; and,

Phase 3. A one-year review of the revised Zoning Ordinance to consider how well it has worked and make coordinated adjustments leading to an ongoing process of regularly scheduled zoning maintenance.

Built into Phase 2 would be “policy changes that will channel growth to mixed-use areas, protect residential neighborhoods and better reflect the goals of the City’s *Comprehensive Plan*,” according to the Draft Report.

The ZRG found eleven themes for zoning reform during its work, each in concert with a policy goal of the *Comprehensive Plan*. Each of these themes is discussed in detail in the ZRG draft report, which is found on the City’s website at newtonma.gov/Planning/zoning-reform-group.htm.

The ZRG will meet again on Thursday, November 17, at 4:00pm in Room 222 at City Hall. The public is invited.

¹Zoning Reform Group – DRAFT Final Report, November 1, 2011 (version 4.1), found at newtonma.gov/Planning/zoning-reform-group.htm.

Archives Committee Memo

By Linda Morrison and Ann Grantham

The archives project is putting together a run of our Bulletins/Newsletters to be bound for the shelves in the Newton Room of the Newton Free Library. We have plenty of copies from 1980 onward, but could use more from the 1960s and 1970s (esp. 1965-1970).

If anyone has some old LWVN material lurking in odd corners, especially notes by Observers, we would be more than happy to take it off your hands! Don't miss out on this chance to clear out space at home! Our goal is to complete this project by the end of next spring. Please contact Linda Morrison at 617-332-6539 or Ann Grantham 617-964-0333.

Extended Producer Responsibility: The Cradle to Grave Concept

By Alison Leary

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws are making a lot of sense as communities struggle with the increasing costs of disposal and recycling of consumer products. And the growing public awareness that incinerating and land filling our waste is a threat to our health and environment makes those traditional options less attractive. When we throw out waste, there really is no “away.”

Years ago most trash was generally more benign than it is today. But now consumer products are made from, or contain, a wide range of materials, including many toxic substances. Florescent lights contain mercury; benzene is used to make polymers and plastics. Mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices can contain hundreds of substances including heavy metals like beryllium, cadmium, and lead. Clearly we don't want workers exposed to these substances, or have them improperly disposed of and contaminating the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Existing efforts by local governments are no longer adequate; few have the funds to cover disposal costs, and the traditional programs like household hazardous waste collection capture only a fraction of what is available for collection. EPR would allow the cost of the disposal or recycling of a product to be included in the purchase price, and would help to share the costs with the consumer and manufacturer,

not just the taxpayer. In the U.S., 32 states have passed EPR mandates for at least one product. These include pesticides, paints, thermostats, re-chargeable batteries and florescent light bulbs.

EPR frameworks can encourage cleaner, safer materials and production processes, as well as to eliminate waste at each stage of the product's life cycle. There is greater incentive for manufacturers to design products that are less toxic, more durable and are easier to recycle.

Maine passed the nation's first EPR law in 2004. This “framework” law makes it much easier to expand the scope of EPR schemes, by establishing a process for adding products to the list of those covered without requiring a new law for each new product. The law establishes a process for creating product stewardship programs for hard-to-recycle products and packaging, moving the physical and financial responsibility for managing old products from the general taxpayer to producers, consumers and others who benefit from products sold and used.

Newton is considering a resolution in support of similar EPR framework legislation for Massachusetts. The City spends upwards of \$6 million to haul our waste to be incinerated at the waste-to-energy plant in Millbury. By supporting EPR laws, we support producing less waste and packaging, more recycling and avoiding the steadily increasing waste disposal costs.

Voters Service Update

by Sharyn Roberts

The Voters Service Committee had a busy season with the 2011 Municipal Election. We kicked off the season on July 4th at Albemarle Field where we had a table that was so colorful and patriotic that we were featured on the Newton Patch website. Thank you to Shirley Farnham, Ingrid Kefauver, Lee Kefauver, and Tami Roberts who stayed until 9:00pm (in the dark) to register new voters from around the state.

We manned booths throughout the summer at the Newton Farmers Markets registering many new voters and other residents who filled out applications for absentee ballots. Thank you to Mary Adelstein, Bonnie Carter, Jo Corro, Shirley Farnham, Ellen Glusman, Ingrid Kefauver, Lee Kefauver, Tami Roberts, and Lynn Scheller who braved the elements.

This fall, we focused our attention on the six contested city races: three for Alderman-at-Large for Wards 1, 6, and 8; and three for School Committee for Wards 2, 4, and 5. On Sunday, October 23, we sponsored six Candidates Debates, back to back, all on one day at NewTV. Thank you to

NewTV, our co-sponsor, and the new government channel producer, Stephen Kessinger, whose production expertise was so professional that our League debates looked like they were produced on a national level. NewTV not only replayed the debates on the government channel until Election Day, but also streamed them online, providing total access.

A big thank you to the Village Bank who underwrote our Voters Guide which appeared both on our website and, as advertised through an ad in the *Newton TAB*, in print at over thirty locations throughout Newton. All candidates, whether running for contested races or not, were invited to participate in the Voters Guide. Thank you to Anne Borg who put together the Voters Guide and made it look like it was done professionally. Thank you to Sue Flicop who created our Voters Guide advertisement that ran in the *TAB*, underwritten by the Village Bank.

The Voters Service Committee also provided rides to the polls on Election Day, November 8. We look forward to providing the same service for the March 6, 2012, Massachusetts Presidential Primary.

The League of Women Voters Newton Invites You to Our

Annual Holiday Party

Sunday, December 4, 2011, 4 – 6 pm

at the Jackson Homestead, 527 Washington St

Join us for good company, wine & cheese

Family and friends are invited

Bring a new member!

LWVN is 75 years old...

We will be sharing stories about the history of the League

RSVP: 617-383-4598 or: info@lwwnewton.org

Donations to the Newton Food Pantry are welcome

League of Women Voters Phonathon

“Many hands make light work”

Come help us for an hour to make calls to other League members. The LWV Phonathon has been our League's biggest fundraiser for the past few years. You can call Newton members or members from another local League. Please bring your own cell phone (if you can't, we do have a couple of extra phones, too).

What: League Phonathon

Where: home of Anne Borg, 155 Winchester St., Newton Highlands

When:

- Tuesday, November 22 10am-2pm
- Tuesday, November 22 6:30pm-9pm
- Monday, November 28 10am-9pm

RSVP: Sharyn Roberts, 617-259-0132 or info@lwwnewton.org

LWVN CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

- 17th Thurs., 11:30am-1:00pm, **Topic Meeting: LWVUS Privatization Study**, at Anne Borg's house.
- 29th Tues., 7:00 pm, **LWVN Transportation Forum**. Druker Auditorium, Newton Free Library.
- 30th Thurs., 9:30-noon, **LWVN Archives Morning**, First Baptist Church Basement, Newton Centre.*

DECEMBER

- 4th Sun., 4:00-6:00pm, **LWVN Holiday Party**. Jackson Homestead, 527 Washington St, Newton
- 7th Wed., 7:00pm, **LWVN Board meeting**. Location 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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