



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS NEWTON

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May 4, 2012

Scott Lennon, President
Newton Board of Aldermen
1000 Commonwealth Ave
Newton Centre, MA 02459

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Dear President Lennon and Aldermen:

The League of Women Voters of Newton strongly endorses Mayor Warren's proposed increase in both water and sewer rates. The capital plan associated with these rates is essential to the efficient and reliable functioning of our water/sewer infrastructure.

A substantial portion of the 600+ miles of piping in Newton is superannuated and needs repair and replacement. Until now Newton has had no plan for maintaining, repairing and recapitalizing the system.

Newton's water pipes are said to be in better condition than our sanitary sewers, but they are leaky. The most recent measure of unmetered water is nearly 25% of the total. This leakage is more than double the maximum acceptable level set by Massachusetts water conservation standards. (It is doubtful that the standard will be met with new, more accurate meter readings.) Unmetered water is a waste; not only of clean water, but also of money paid to the MWRA. The Mayor's proposed capital plan, funded by increased rates, will enable us to anticipate needed repairs and prioritize asset renewal while saving money in the long run.

It will be expensive to fix our sewers, but not as expensive as NOT to fix them; they are in sorry shape. Most of the sewage (58%), which Newton sends to Deer Island for treatment, is storm or ground water. This high proportion of inflow and infiltration does not count sewer overflows, which have been known to occur during extreme wet weather. The proposed capital plan would first pay for a detailed study of the pipes in order to find the worst leaks and develop an engineering plan to fix them.

A great deal of time and thought has gone into the development of this long-range plan. It is necessary, but may not be sufficient. MWRA rates are expected to increase at least until FY 2022. Water conservation and reduction of inflow and infiltration in other communities may keep Newton's share of MWRA costs constant. And a thorough survey of City mains may uncover more urgent repairs than we anticipate.

A recent report of the Massachusetts Water Infrastructure Finance Commission should bring better understanding of the need to reinvest in public piping and offers some hope for state assistance. With a plan in place, Newton will be in a better position to seek such funds.

The League hopes that the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen will continue to cooperate to achieve full cost pricing of these utilities, to add predictability to the rate increases and to protect our citizens from the consequences, both fiscal and environmental, of leaks in the water and sewer systems.

Sincerely,

Anne S. Borg Sue Flicop
Co-Presidents, League of Women Voters of Newton