

League of Women Voters of Newton Newsletter

Volume 7 Issue 2

February 2001

The Community Preservation Act

By AnnaMaria Abernathy

In the coming months, Newton citizens and aldermen will make decisions about the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which became law last September and went into effect in December.

The Act provides about \$26 million annually, to be apportioned among the communities that adopt it. The State would match, in varying degrees, a surcharge on the real property tax. The city must spend no more than 5% on administration of the program, and at least 10% of the funds on each of the following: acquisition and preservation of open space, creation and support of affordable housing, acquisition and preservation of historic buildings and landscapes. The remaining portion, at least 65%, can be allocated as desired, or saved for future uses, including recreation (which is not in the first 10%).

The CPA is complicated, allowing participating communities to choose surcharges of from 1% to 3%, and various exemptions. For example, if Newton chose a 1% surcharge on tax bills, first exempting \$100,000 of the assessment of residences and totally exempting owner-occupied residences of low-income or senior moderate-income owners, the annual revenue would be \$991,945. For the average home valued at \$484,000, this would be a \$46.37 surcharge. A 2% surcharge with the same exemptions would yield \$1,983,000, (average home paying \$72.74). If commercial and industrial properties were also excluded, the respective yields would be \$725,000 and \$1,453,000. The matching amount by the State would depend on how many communities participate, and on a formula favoring less-wealthy communities; the maximum match would be 100%.

As Mike Clarke of the Newton Conservators observed recently in the Newton TAB, none of Newton's long-term debt is for parks, recreation, conservation lands, or affordable housing, and capital spending in these areas is negligible and decreasing. There was no thought of City purchase of any of the open space recently sold by Andover-Newton Theological School. Other private schools may decide to sell; 550 acres in private golf courses are unprotected; and the Boston Edison/Kessler Woods land will be on the market. CPA funds would enable the City to be a player in future land dispositions.

Equally important, small scale undertakings would become possible, e.g., purchase of or conservation restrictions on community-enhancing green spaces. And the ever-increasing active recreation requirements could be addressed.

The "Affordable Housing" portion must be used for capital or loan expenditures associated with providing community housing. Examples are: loans for first-time home buyers; gap funding for non-profit or other developers in acquiring, rehabbing, or building affordable homes; grants for the purchase and rehab of one- to four-family homes by income eligible buyers; funds to adapt the homes of elderly and disabled town residents; to establish an endowed reserve fund to support affordable housing initiatives.

Continued on page 5

Don't Stand There, Run! (for elected office)

by Bonnie Carter

If you, or someone you know, is interested in learning how to run for local elected office, now is the time. Newton's Municipal Election in the fall of 2001 will feature all local officials up for re-election

- Mayor
- 24 Aldermen
- 8 School Committee Members

The League is planning a workshop to be held on Saturday, May 5 for candidates and campaign managers. The topics to be addressed are:

- Duties and responsibilities of the office
- Election Calendar
- Nomination Papers
- Resources: books, websites
- Budget and fundraising
- Reporting under the campaign finance law
- How to conduct a campaign: coffees, door to door, mailings, debates
- Public Relations and the media

If you are interested in attending the workshop or working on the preparations, please call the League phone at 964-0014 and leave a message.

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Deborah Hirsch	965-1475
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The LWVN Newsletter is published nine times per year. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization open to all citizens of voting age. For more information about the League of Women Voters, call 964-0014.

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The League in Winter

In the bitter cold and gray of mid winter, it is time to buckle down and do the work required to meet our spring schedule. I am at once distracted and motivated by thoughts of a quiet row down a sun-drenched river, smelling sea grass and seeking a glimpse of a kingfisher, spying on herons, ibis or trumpeter swans. Well prepared for our busy spring itinerary, I may be able to steal off on a good day, to be in that dreamy place.

The League in winter is a source of warmth, too - a nourishing hot soup of good minds at task. A living room of thoughtful conversation seeking order from a chaos of ideas. I am touched by the good souls and hearty spirits of you who make public service an integral part of your lives, and constructive criticism an essential element of that service. Although the public interest is often threatened by those who seek to stifle opposing views, we strive to listen, always knowing we do not have to agree!

I am challenged in the midst of you to help keep our goals in view relative to our resources, but fortified by the large and increasing participation of members who volunteer to work on League program. This spring we are focused on two main events, while keeping close watch on several issues. On April 29, League supporters will be treated to a talk with Martha

Coakley, Middlesex County DA, as we host our fourth biennial "Champagne and Chocolate" fundraiser. On May 5, Bonnie Carter and a growing committee will put on a workshop on how to run for local public office, hoping to encourage competition in our upcoming local elections. Look for details on the cover - there are many opportunities to contribute to the success of these events; spread the word - and please don't hesitate to call and join in.

I hope that many of you plan to attend the "Environmental Legislation Action and Advocacy" program at the Library February 26, that LWVN cosponsors with the Green Decade Coalition. This year, about half of the meeting will be devoted to introducing what implementation of the Community Preservation Act could mean to Newton. There is a lot to consider in the options Newton has about whether and how to implement this Act, and what kinds of projects would most benefit the city if we could build and administer such a fund. A follow up citywide focus group will be announced for April 9 at the meeting. Let us know if you would be interested as well in attending a special League meeting in March devoted to this topic.



Save the Date!

Champagne and Chocolate

Middlesex District Attorney Martha Coakley has agreed to be our speaker for Champagne and Chocolate. Arrangements are proceeding nicely for the biannual fundraiser which will take place on Sunday April 29th from 3pm-5pm.

League volunteers have located a striking home in Newton Corner for the event, contacted chocolatiers and begun sampling champagnes. More volunteers are needed so if you are interested in lending a hand please contact Amelia Koch at 244-2647. Watch for your invitation in the mail. ■

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Not-so-Trivial Question

**Thankfully answered
by Bob Capeless**

Q: Why are Newton's municipal elections non-partisan? (Did you notice that candidates run without a party designation?)

A: In its earliest years as a city, Newton had a bi-cameral legislative body and partisan elections. So, too, did every other Massachusetts city.

A reform of its charter in 1897 gave Newton a unicameral legislative body and non-partisan elections, a lead that ultimately was followed by all cities, except Everett as to the legislative make-up and by all or nearly all as to partisan elections.

Undoubtedly, there were varying political situations in the Commonwealth's various cities (now numbering thirty-nine) but on the substantive merits of the change to non-partisanship, two reasons usually were offered:

First, partisan differences over Federal and state government issues had no real relevance to the problems facing local governments.

Second, even the largest cities were small enough to permit local voters to determine a choice among candidates as to fitness to serve without the benefit of party endorsement.

Buttressing this position was the public policy of the Massachusetts General Court in establishing standard charters for cities. Of the six so created, only Plan F, the last one created, provides for partisan elections. ■

James P.D. Waters, Chair
Newton Election Commission
61 Stearns Street
Newton Centre, MA 02459

January 26, 2001

Dear Commissioner Waters:

The Newton League of Women Voters supports efforts to improve the administration and conduct of elections in Newton.

At the meeting of the Newton Election Commission of November 28, 2000, members of the Election Commission acknowledged mismanagement which led to numerous irregularities at the polls during the 2000 election (particularly regarding handling of the paper ballot and improper distribution of ballots that resulted in Question 9 not appearing on at least 29 voting machines). The Election Commission recognized that the following need improvement: thorough and consistent training of poll workers, community outreach to assure adequate staffing for elections, oversight to ensure clear and consistent application of standards and rules governing elections, and quality control when preparing for and administering elections.

The League appreciates that the Commission took the time at their November 28 meeting to hear our concerns and those of other community members. We are looking forward to your efforts to ensure that future elections in Newton are run according to a higher standard of proficiency, and would eagerly attend future meetings where these items will be addressed.

The Newton League joins Leagues across the country in collecting information and reporting on voting administration and procedures. To this end, we would appreciate information about what steps the Commission plans to take to address these issues in Newton. We remind you of our request for the minutes of the November meeting. It would also be very helpful to us if we could acquire copies of any training materials used by the Commission in the training of poll workers.

Thank you very much.

Respectfully,

Deb Crossley
President

Carol Ann Shea
Local Action Chair

Florence Rubin
Local Action Committee

cc: Mayor David B. Cohen
Alan Licarie, Executive Secretary
Members of the Election Commission

EDUCATION REPORT

by Beverly Spencer

There is much activity on the education front in Newton and at the state level this winter. In Newton we are following the high school renovations and redistricting processes and beginning to look at the questions surrounding the issue of respect for human differences as it is reflected in the schools' curricula. At the state level the league has recently published "Funding Fairness: Designing a Distribution Formula for Massachusetts School Aid" and the state League's Study Committee on Education Reform has published an Interim Report on its ed reform study which Newton League members participated in by interviewing School Department officials, teachers, School Committee members and parents. Our members are currently reviewing these two publications.

Since the passage of the referendum supporting the design funds for the renovations, our committee members have attended School Committee and Aldermanic meetings where the plans and current process have been discussed. At this time representatives of the architect, Drummey, Rosane and Anderson, have met with the principals and faculties of both high schools as well as the School Councils. On January 10 several League members attended the special aldermanic meeting where the mayor spoke supporting the renovation project and outlined the need for it.

Jeff Young reiterated the school department's reasoning for the need for two mid-sized schools and Verne Vance pointed out the importance of the parameters of programs addressing educational needs. A number of members of the Green Decade Coalition spoke during the portion devoted to public comments. Addressed were the various environmental issues that should be taken into consideration: solar energy; water and energy costs; "green building" practices; pollutants from building materials; air and lighting concerns at Newton North.

Ken Hamilton, president of the Newton Teachers Association, spoke of what the teachers envision as future possibilities: true community use of buildings; perhaps an alumni center; expansion of child care facilities; a Small Business center as well as other potential uses. Len Mead, president of the Newton Taxpayers Association, said that while there was no question as to the need for the project, he urged reducing the scale and cost. Other speakers brought up concerns about power and networking upgrades being needed in 10 years, the need to publish as much information as possible for the public on a web site, etc. We will continue to monitor the process in this manner and through our participation on School Councils and other groups following the process.

Through attending the School Committee discussions on the establishment of the criteria they will consider for the redistricting and through a member's participation on the Redistricting Task Force (RTF), we are following this process as well. The RTF includes one parent from each of the 15 elementary schools in Newton as well as School Department and City representatives. The Superintendent sent out a letter to all parents of school children in early January in which he outlined the process the School Department will be following in making the decision regarding redistricting. A proposed timeline shows 2 public hearings, one on January 29 and a second on May 7, after the Redistricting Task Force has submitted its report on proposed options to the Superintendent. Several LWVN Ed Committee attended the first hearing, which was held at Brown Middle School. Crossley spoke for the League at the hearing (see statement page 5). We will keep in close contact with this process as it unfolds. ■

Committees - in - Action

E d u c a t i o n

Focus	Increasing high school enrollments, school financing, testing & standards	
Members	Nancy Crowley Deborah Hirsch Andrea Kelley Andrea Kozinetz	Anne Lerner Robin Maltz Beth Wilkinson
Contact	Beverly Spencer Board Liaison	965-6365

H u m a n R i g h t s

Focus	League outreach, relevance and support for the human rights of Newton's diverse populations	
Members	Joan Bates Marion Cowan Holly Gunner Lilly Jefferson Anne Lerner	Ruth Nemzoff Wand Persimmon Dorothy Reece Jeanne White
Contact	Holly Gunner, Chair (964-0767)	

L a n d U s e / T r a n s p o r t a t i o n

Focus	Interrelationship between land use and transportation and its effects on Newton & surrounding communities	
Members	AnnaMaria Abernathy Anita Capeless Carol Ann Shea Susie Heyman	
Contact	Anita Capeless	969-9483

L o c a l A c t i o n

Focus	Reducing the size of the Board of Aldermen	
Members	in formation - all welcome	
Contact	Carol Ann Shea	969-2121

N e w s l e t t e r

Members	Jane Leighton Deb Hirsch	Liz Lieberman Linda Morrison
Contact	Andrea Kelley	964-4609

E d u c a t i o n R e f o r m

Focus	LWVMA study on ED Reform	
Members	Deborah Hirsch Andrea Kelley Anne Lerner Leslie Lockhart Robin Maltz	
Contact	Leslie Lockhart	527-5046

You may call committee contact or a Board officer or director to learn more about current committee work. All are welcome to participate.

Legislative Roundtable on NewTV

by Deb Crossley

This month, Senator Creem, Representatives Balser, Kahn and Koutoujian joined the League on NewTV to discuss education reform - its successes, failures and future in Massachusetts. Senator Creem outlined key points in the governor's proposal to revise the distribution formula for state aid to schools, noting that aid to Newton would be cut dramatically if passed.

Representatives cited the need for additional funding for special education, for funding overall to keep up with the costs of the program, and to reexamine and create better tools for how to measure the success of public education. It is a big topic for a half hour show, and we may revisit several of the issues raised in future shows.

The next taping will be February 27. The topic proposed is clean elections law. Please call the League phone or NewTV to comment on the show. League members are welcome and encouraged to participate in developing material for the show.

STATEMENT ON REDISTRICTING PROCESS

Presented at the hearing at Brown Middle School
January 29, 2001



To the Newton School Committee:

The League of Women Voters of Newton supports the School Committee's efforts to craft guidelines to provide a framework for public discussion and for the work of the Redistricting Task Force. The League supports long-range planning and sees the importance of this process resulting in a plan that provides equal access to educational resources citywide.

Community input is essential to a fair process. However, the School Committee's charge as citywide elected officials is to develop a plan that will best serve the community as a whole. In redrawing the lines that will determine school boundaries, the committee must take into account the needs of students, the capacities and limitations of our facilities, and the wisest use of community resources. As a community, we should realize that the wishes of a few may conflict with the integrity of a best plan for the many, and allow the School Committee to make the difficult choices necessary to craft the best long term plan for everyone.

We urge only that in addition to making materials available on the School Department web site, that every effort be made to keep all citizens current with the stages of the redistricting process.

Deborah Crossley
President

Community Preservation Act *Continued from page 1*

Funds for "Historic Preservation" could be used to: upgrade historic buildings such as libraries and schools; reuse historic community buildings such as fire houses, police stations, abandoned schools etc. for affordable housing, community centers, office space; provide accessibility at historic sites - elevators, ramps, restrooms, etc.

CPA spells out the process by which municipalities may adopt it. Preference is given to the Board of Aldermen, which may vote adoption and decide the amount of the surcharge at least 35 days before the next election (Nov. 6),

so that citizens may vote on it as a ballot question. Only if the aldermen have not voted by 90 days before the election (Aug. 8) may citizens begin a drive to place it on the ballot by signature petition. In that case, 5% of the registered voters must sign petitions by September 25; this would require collecting some 3000 signatures in 48 days.

A future article will describe how the CPA would be implemented through a Community Preservation Committee appointed by the Board of Aldermen.

Meanwhile, for more information

and discussion, come to the Monday Feb. 26 meeting at the Main Library at 7 pm (see p. 8 calendar listing). Also, see the web site: <http://www.communitypreservation.org/>

Lifetime Membership Available

The League is offering a new Lifetime membership category. Give it as a gift or take advantage of it for yourself. A Lifetime membership provides you with membership in the local Newton league as well as state and national leagues for your lifetime. If you are interested, send this form along with check for \$1000.

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

- ☐ I would like to join the League of Women voters of Newton. Enclosed is my check for \$50 payable to LWVN.
- ☐ Lifetime membership \$1000
- ☐ I would like to receive materials about the League.
- ☐ I would like to be contacted by a League member to talk about LWVN.

Mail this form (and your check, if joining) to:
Judy Jaffe at 158 Moffat Road, Waban 02468

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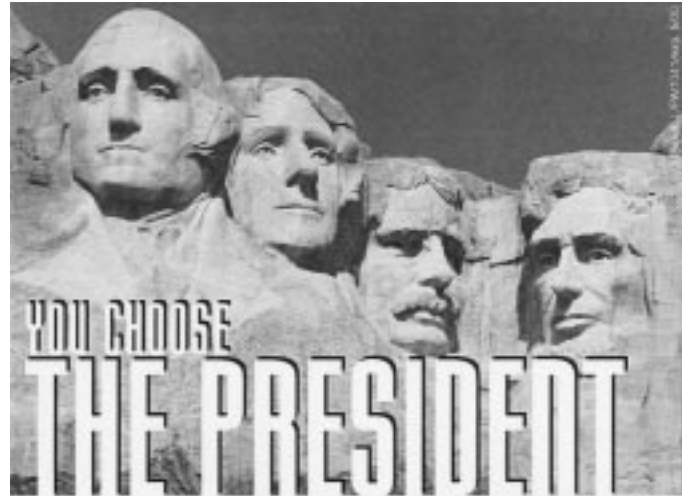
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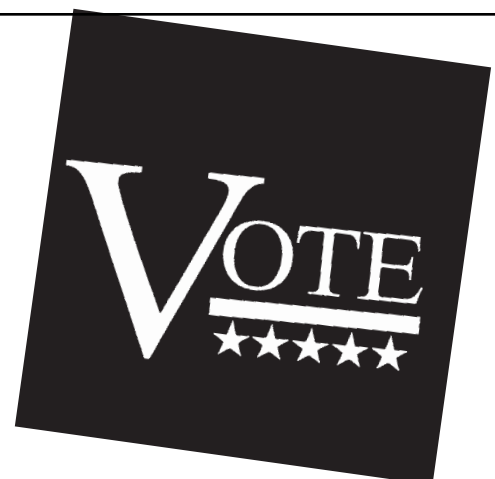
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but our work... NEVER!*



LWVN CALENDAR

February

- 7 Wednesday, 7:30 pm LWVN Board meeting and State LWV Program Planning at Reisman, 28 Fairway Drive, West Newton
- 22 Thursday, LWVN Environmental Assessment Committee meeting, @ 18 Linder Terrace, N. Corner, call DeDe Vittori for info 964-8190
- 26 Monday, Environmental Legislation: Action & Advocacy, cosponsored by the League and Green Decade, Newton Free Library, 7-9pm
- 26 Monday, 7 pm "Messing with Mother Nature": Environmental Endocrine Hypothesis, speaker Sheldon Krinsky, Environmental Speaker Series by Green Decade, Pesticide Month, Newton Free Library
- 27 Legislative Roundtable, 7 pm, taping at NewTV studio, Topic: Clean Elections Law

March

- 7 LWVN Board meeting 7:30 pm at Koch, 117 High Street, Newton Upper Falls
- 21 Wednesday, Local Program Planning, members only, time and place tba
- 21 Wednesday, Relationship Violence Action Committee (RVAC) public "idea" forum, Newton Free Library, 4-6pm
- 4 LWVN Board meeting
- 25 Day on the Hill, Statehouse, 9 am to noon, members only
- 26 Thursday, LWVN Environmental Assessment Committee meeting, call DeDe Vittori for info 964-8190

April

Sunday, April 29

Champagne & Chocolate

FUNDRAISER WITH MARTHA COAKLEY,
Middlesex County D.A. 3-5pm

May

- 5 "Don't Stand There - Run!"
9am-1pm, 'How-To' Workshop
for local candidates & campaign
managers, location tba
- 15 LWVN Annual Meeting,
Newton Senior Center, 6 pm
Members Only

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