

League of Women Voters of Newton Newsletter

Volume 9 Issue 2

February 2003

League of Women Voters of Newton

January 15, 2003

Newton Community Preservation Committee,
cc: Ad Hoc Committee on Jeffrey Sacks,
Chair Community Preservation

Members of the CPC:

First, we again thank the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for their great service to the community, appreciating the time and commitment that your task entails.

Over the holidays, the League of Women Voters of Newton convened a subcommittee to more fully assess the range of proposals requesting CPC funds. As suggested at the December hearings, we have prepared more detailed commentary on this first round of requests that we share with you here and in the attached document. Without seeming to duplicate your work, we offer these considerations because of our support for passage of the CPA, and our concern that this valuable program be administered wisely so as to build public trust and ensure its future.

Building public trust in large part means public understanding that the CPC and the aldermen are abiding by Chapter 267 of the Acts of 2000 (An Act Relative to Community Preservation) and that Newton is administering it well. It is important that monies be spent only on proposals that conform to both the letter and the spirit of the Law, especially as interpreted in the Community Preservation Committee's own guidelines. The League is particularly concerned that the monies not be used to fund what ought to be maintenance performed by city departments, or replacement of infrastructure which ought to be funded from the capital budget.

Remembering that the CPA monies do not need to be spent at once, we urge that initial expenditures be cautious. Since there is great need in the city which has not yet found expression in proposals before the Committee, it would be prudent to set aside some of the funds in this first "pot of gold", so that the City could act quickly in response to any unusual opportunity that comes along in the future.

We note, especially, that the City Open Space Plan identifies several parcels that would carry large price tags, and suggest that a good share of the CP monies be reserved for such opportunities.

What follows then, are LWV comments specific to each proposal before you, in the hopes that you may find our reading useful to your work.

Respectfully submitted,

Amelia Koch Deborah Crossley

LWV President LWV\ Local Action Chair

(Read these comments on Page 3)

City Exploring Possible Purchase of Kessler Woods

by Priscilla M. Leith

Mayor David Cohen, the Community Preservation Committee, Ald. Rick Lipof (W8), and various other city officials are involved in discussions as to whether and how the City of Newton buy Kessler Woods, the largest remaining tract of open space in Newton. It is located near LaGrange St, Vine St, and the Brookline town line in Newton Centre.

The CPC, chaired by Jeffrey Sacks, held a scheduled meeting on January 15 to continue debate on proposals that were given a mid-December hearing. Elgin St. Open Space; Burial Grounds Restoration (3 separate locations); CASCAP elderly housing; CAN-DO Cambria Road Section 8 two-family rental housing; Flowed Meadow Improvements; and Chafin House Library Restoration were pursued at this meeting. The CASCAP Nonantum Village Place request will be recommended for funding at the next CPA meeting. Discussion will continue on the others at the January 30 meeting. The CPC is restricted, by state statute, to funding projects for Affordable Housing, Open Space, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

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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 617-964-0014.

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A Small Thoughtful Group

It the time of year to turn in our membership list to National so we are making some calls to make sure we won't lose any members who put the bill for their Annual dues in the To Do Pile and never quite got a round to it. We always hate to lose members, you are our most precious resource. What is it that Margaret Mead said? "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Thank you Elaine Reisman and Pat Acton for all your efforts!

One small group of League member put some thought this month into reviewing the submissions to the Community Preservation Committee. Deb Crossley brought together seven Board and off board League members to read and discuss the proposals. Having worked to pass the CPA the Newton League was very interested to closely follow this important first round of funding. You can read the results of our deliberations elsewhere in this newsletter. It seems to get harder and harder to find common meeting time, get materials out to people and follow up to make sure that everything is written up. I want to thank Deb for creating the opportunity.

February's unit meetings are on affordable housing and should be terrific. The presenter is League member Josephine McNeil who is a founding member of CAN-DO (Citizens for Affordable Housing in Newton), a community-based nonprofit housing development organization, and currently its Executive Director. Josephine's work in the area of Affordable Housing was recognized by the City of Newton when she was designated the Year 2000 recipient of the Human Rights Award. She received the Newton Women's Commission award in 2002, and also received the 2002 Bob Swett Excellence in Housing Award. Hope to see you there!



Unit Meetings in Affordable Housing

by Janet Stearns

The unit meetings on affordable housing are scheduled for February 12 from 11:30 to 1:30 and on February 13 from 7:30 to 9:30 pm. These meetings promise to offer a lively discussion of the affordable housing crisis that we are facing in Newton and throughout the Commonwealth. Josephine McNeil, Executive Director of Citizens for Affordable Housing in Newton-Development Organization (CAN-DO), will be present to discuss what her organization is doing to promote the development of affordable

housing in Newton. We also plan to discuss the housing planning efforts that are currently underway in the City and concerns with proposed state legislation to limit the use of comprehensive permits as a tool to promote affordable housing development. Finally, we also hope to discuss other affordable housing related activities that the Newton League could plan for 2003. If you are interested in becoming more involved in the League's efforts on affordable housing please contact Janet Stearns or Deb Crossley. ■

Community Preservation:

2002 Proposals

Review and recommendations by the
League of Women Voters of Newton

City Hall

The League does not support funding. The cupola and window projects are not in the spirit of the CPA, constituting more maintenance than historic preservation, defined in the CPA as "protection of personal or real property from injury, harm or destruction, but not including maintenance." Here there is no danger of injury, harm, or destruction. The proposal does not show "community support." Citizens may view this as misuse of the CP funds. The lighting proposal seems non-essential in a time of fiscal austerity, and is too imprecise to deserve funding at this time. The cupola and balustrades' lead coated copper finish requires no maintenance while paint would require regular maintenance. Maintenance funds are scarce, despite the large monthly income (c. \$5000) from the cell phone antennas installed in the cupola. The windows, even if seen as "restoration" lack a real cost estimate, and evidence is needed of search for, and failure to find, appropriate custom replacement windows (e.g. Pella) that would be truly maintenance-free.

The lighting portion of the proposal would replace the current functional lighting with less energy efficient fixtures. Is this really the most urgent need for these funds? The cost estimate is admittedly imprecise and might not suffice. Further to all of these concerns no other funding sources are identified. CPA funds are limited and will have greater impact if not used as the sole source.

Newton Free Library/ Chafin House Restoration

The League supports funding. (\$196,000) Exterior restoration of this landmark building will enable proper maintenance by the city and prevent the loss of an important historic structure. This building also establishes a boundary for this community between the more commercial center and the adjacent resi-

dential area. The League has two concerns regarding this project. First, no other funding sources are yet identified. Would it be possible to leverage additional funds from historic preservation groups? Second, we are concerned about the adequacy of the budget. Are funds requested sufficient to insure that recommended repairs be properly completed? If not the repairs may not last or it may not be possible to complete the needed repairs.

Outdoor Classroom Memorial Spaulding Elementary

The League does not support funding. While the funds requested are significant, only the outdoor classroom portion of this proposal could fit within the guidelines established by the CP committee. However, the League is concerned that although an outdoor classroom would "serve as a suitable site for nature-related education", this installation would have limited benefit since practically speaking only Memorial Spaulding students could take advantage of the site. Additionally, the League is very concerned about the precedent being set here. Would use of CP monies to support one school raise equity concerns?

Community Classroom/Albermarle

The League supports funding. (\$87,135) This proposal fits very well under the goals for Recreation projects described in the City of Newton "Community Preservation Plan", pp 11-14. The project is located near established public recreational facilities and provides multiple recreation opportunities for a variety of activities enjoyed by people of all ages, and will make the park accessible to residents with physical disabilities.

Docks

The League does not support funding. The project seeks funding to replace the docks at Crystal Lake. Replacing the

docks is a routine maintenance and does nothing to change current uses: delineating the swim areas, providing a platform for lifeguards and swim instructors. Replacing the docks does not increase access to the swimming area and does not meet a variety of recreation needs. The new docks would not provide access for disabled residents. If it could be shown that the docks proposal would in fact increase access to the water park, and by how much, then CP funds could be used to support that portion of the project that represents the expansion. CP funds potentially could be used to support a future project at Crystal Lake that represents the expansion for recreational use. The current proposal to replace the docks however, gave no understandable evidence of such expansion.

New East Ball Field

The League does not support funding. This proposal is too narrowly focused, would serve a limited number of residents for a restricted use, and does not expand accessibility to the existing facility. Other clubs have raised these kinds of monies privately. These kinds of expenditures need to be carefully coordinated with Parks and Recreation department's own planning citywide for field management and development priorities.

Flowed Meadow Improvement Project

The League supports funding. (\$74,250) This project fits very well with the Resources described in the City of Newton "Community Preservation Plan" under Open Space, pp 7-10. It contains watershed land, fields, forest land, wetlands, abuts the Charles River, and is a corridor linking city-owned recreational land at Auburndale Park ("The Cove") with recently purchased city-owned Wabasso St. land, and linking beyond to park land in Waltham.

Continued on page 5

Committees - in - Action

E d u c a t i o n

Focus Renovations, increasing high school enrollments, school financing, testing & standards

Members Ann Grantham Robin Maltz
Susie Heyman Fran Osten
Jody Klein Beverly Spencer
Anne Larner Beth Wilkinson

Contact Andrea Kelley 617964-4609
Andrea Kozinetz 617964-6490
Co-Chairs

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 Sharon Balfour
Susie Heyman
Jody Klein
Linda Morrison

Contact Holly Gunner, Chair 617964-0767

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
Lynne Sullivan

Contact Anita Capeless 617969-9483

L o c a l A c t i o n

Focus Various local issues

Members In formation - all welcome

Contact Deb Crossley 617244-7597
Chair

N o m i n a t i n g

Members Deb Hirsch Fran Seasholes
Elaine Reisman Janet Stearns

Contact Sandy Butzel 617332 8021
Chair

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 Review

by Deb Crossley

Working with NewTV, the LWV has produced a new show each month since we last reported here about the September show on the anti-snob zoning law, Chapter 40B, we hope you have been watching.

The first show of 2003 has a new format - producer Mike Padden-Rubin and host Deb Crossley take you inside the State House to talk with each of our legislators in their offices. We get a tour, meet some of the staff, and hear from all of our legislators about what they think the greatest challenge going forward will be with a newly elected government in place. This took two visits and many hours to tape, and will run starting mid January for three weeks. Many thanks go to Janet Stearns for doing the coordination and background work to put the show together each month.

Last October, president Amelia Koch was joined by representative Ruth Balser, to discuss the then upcoming state elections, with particular attention given to the three ballot questions. It was one of the few media shows that discussed the ballot questions in some detail.

In November, league member Holly Gunner hosted Senator Cynthia Creem, Representatives Ruth Balser and Kay Khan in a discussion about how the results of the state elections may drive legislative priorities and business on Capitol Hill come January.

In December, Senator Cynthia Creem, Representatives Ruth Balser and Kay Khan joined Deb Crossley to focus on health care, the consequences of cuts already made to try to balance the current budget, and where we need to go from here: what we can better regulate (insurance premiums, prescription drug costs) what we can protect (access to coverage, health care for children), and what we could expand upon to achieve a better system.

Tune in to the BLUE Channel on NewTV for the full half hour show: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 5:30 and 10:30pm.■

U p - D a t e o n F r e e A i r T i m e

Our Democracy...Our Airwaves

By Susan Rosenbaum

The Newton League has been an active participant in the Free Air Time Grassroots effort, Our Democracy...Our Airwaves. Local members circulated declarations forms for signatures off those calling for free airtime and NewTV aired an informational program on five Friday evenings, (Blue Channel on Fridays at 8:30 pm—December 13, 20, 27, January 3 and 24.) These actions are part of a nation-wide campaign to enable the Alliance for Better Campaigns to support legislation that will change the delivery of political debates for future elections.

Since the airwaves are owned by the general public and the networks are not charged to use them, the networks should be held responsible for providing information to the public. Advocates for Free Air Time want to require the networks to devote two hours each week (one of which would be in or near prime time) to candidates issues and discussions in the month before an election. Another proposal is for the networks to provide qualifying candidates with vouchers to run a limited number of free ads on radio and television.

Thank you to all who participated in this project. We hope that your action leads to election reform that will allow all qualified candidates the opportunity to seek and run for public office.■

Cont. from page 3

Community Preservation: 2 0 0 2 P r o p o s a l s

Restore Historic Burying Grounds

The League recommends funding. (\$188,277) This proposal meets the historic preservation goals for use of CPA funds described in the City of Newton "Community Preservation Plan", p 18. The project will provide funding for the most urgent needs facing the restoration and preservation of the burial grounds landscape needs and the repair and cleaning of deteriorating headstones. Funding this proposal will preserve this important piece of Newton's history.

CASCAP Nonantum Village Place

The League supports funding. (\$850,000) This is precisely the kind of project deserving CPA funding. It is successfully worked out, well supported and documented, by a reputable company with a track record. HUD's newly announced 30% reduction in funding presents a danger, so the grant should be made conditional on the "firm commitment" of the HUD money, which the project "Timeline" envisages for May 2003. Otherwise, there should be no objection to the size of the request, since it is only \$24,286 per unit of needed affordable elder housing.

Christina St. Home Ownership Project: Four Units

The League recommends funding. (\$300,000) It addresses urgent need for moderately priced units for Newton employees and their families, which was a key ingredient and controversial element of passing the CPA in Newton. However, the deed restriction mentioned in the CAN-DO Board president's letter should be made an explicit

part of the proposal so that new owners who are benefiting from this subsidy must pass on the unit at a fair rate. We also recommend an opinion from the City Solicitor's office about the legality of favoring city employees.

Cambria Road Project: Two Rental Units

The League supports funding. (\$200,000) Located at 18-20 Cambria Rd, West Newton, this project would help supply two needed units of affordable family rental housing. The purchase & sale agreement with owner(s) was signed in November 2002. Funding package includes \$400,000 in financing for purchase and rehabilitation by Auburndale Coop. Bank, \$200,000 from Newton's Community Development Block Grants and other. Residents will hold Section 8 certificates, may be current Newton residents whose present Section 8 housing has been phased out.

Pillar House

The League does not support funding. No CP money should be used to private benefit, however desirable "saving" a piece of property or structure may be. Just having this proposal recommended to public hearing drew the kind of ire from the community that bodes poorly for the future of the CP program. It is our recommendation that in the future, such a proposal be disqualified prior to public hearing.

Archeological Survey

The League does not support funding. This notion that the CP planning process would benefit by a survey of the historical artifacts and archeology of the

city, needs first to be vetted with the appropriate local organizations and institutions. If the Jackson Homestead, the Historical Commission and others saw such a survey as necessary to the orderly process of administering CP monies, only then could this request be considered, perhaps as part of the expense of administration. We feel that this proposal was not sufficiently formed to be recommended to a public hearing, as it does not address the primary purposes of the Act.

Elgin Street

The League supports funding. The land to be purchased in this proposal meets several of the goals of the Community Preservation Committee including providing protection for land listed in the "Open Space and Recreation Plan", expanding existing open space, and Protect a natural feature... such as a vista. This project would seem an excellent use of CPA funds.

Our review committee of eight: AnnaMaria Abernathy, Deb Crossley, Jody Klein, Amy Koch, Priscilla Leith, Sue Rosenbaum, and Ben Weisbuch. Each member of the committee was assigned several proposals to read and consider against both the Law and the CPC's own guidelines. At least two people read each proposal, and then they met to discuss our collective opinion. Everyone was assigned to write up summaries and Deb Crossley put them together.■

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

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- ☐ 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:
Andrea Kozinetz Holtz at 8 Stoney Brae Road,
Newton Highlands, MA 02461

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- Enjoy the cyber-companionship of League members from across the state!

Our listserv is called LWVMA Leaders, but it is open & useful to all League members. It's really simple to use. Once you've signed up, just send an email message to the list address and it is sent immediately to all others who have also subscribed. Anyone else on the list can then reply, and the discussion is off and running!

Sign up now by sending an empty email to wvmaleaders-subscribe@yahoo.com

Contact LWVM at lwvma@lwvma.org or 617-523-2999 with any questions.

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Kessler Woods

At the request of the Mayor, Kessler Woods was added to the agenda for this CPC meeting. The Mayor was informed, via a phone call on or about 12 January that this tract of land was being put up for bids and NStar asked if the City of Newton were interested in acquiring it. Bids are due by February 21, 2003. City officials involved in discussions, and the CPC, feel that time is critical, and the City must make an offer as soon as possible if that is financially feasible. The Committee spent half an hour discussing the 43 acre parcel, which is now owned by NStar, the successor to original owner Boston Edison Co. They agreed by consensus to write a strong letter in support of using CPA funds to help the city acquire development control of Kessler Woods.

The CPC agreed that the acquisition of Kessler Woods is central to the mission of CPA, and holds promise for multiple uses, such as protection of open space, development for recreation and affordable housing potential.

Estimates are that the parcel may cost \$12-14M. Financing possibilities need to be explored, but the potential is good. A CPC member has ascertained that the CP real estate tax revenue stream can be bonded for a long-term loan. The City currently has about \$4.8M in the bank from the first "pot" of CP funds that came in 2002. The proposals (11) heard in December 2002 aimed to qualify for funding from that "pot" of money. Partial funding for Kessler Woods may now be added to the remaining, for a total of 12 proposals competing for the remaining \$4.3M.

The next round of CPC proposals is due in April, but the amount of money available isn't yet known. Hearings have yet to be scheduled. Kessler Woods is also a potential contender for some of that second "pot" of funds. ■

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LWVN CALENDAR

February

- 12 Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.,
Unit Meeting, Affordable Housing,
at Fiora Houghteling's,
15 Bullough Park, Newtonville,
617-969-7764
- 12 Working Board Meeting/
Newsletter Deadline
- 13 Thursday, 7:30 – 9:30 p.m.,
Unit Meeting, at Pat Acton's,
48 Miller Rd., Newton Centre,
617-965-5572
- 18 Tuesday, 7:30 P.M., at Andrea
Kozinetz Holtz', 8 Stony Brae Rd.,
Newton Highlands, 617-964-6490
- 26 Wednesday, 7:30 Board Meeting,
at Elaine Reisman's,
28 Fairway Drive, West Newton
617 244 6439

March

- 12 Wednesday, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m.,
Unit Meeting, Energy Action Plan,
at Sandy Butzel's, 237 Mill St.,
Newtonville 617-332-8021
- 12 Wednesday, Working Board
Meeting/Newsletter Deadline
- 18 Tuesday, 7:30 P.M., at Andrea
Kozinetz Holtz', 8 Stony Brae Rd.,
Newton Highlands, 617-964-6490
- 26 Wednesday, Board Meeting

What is an Energy Action Plan? Join Us to Find Out!

by Deb Crossley

After several years of advocacy by members of the Green Decade Coalition and others, Newton is about to take an important next step toward developing its own energy action plan. Newton is a "city for climate protection", or CCP, which makes it part of a national climate protection campaign, but we have a ways to go to make a difference. CCP communities, which number hundreds nationwide, take global warming seriously to the point of implementing policies and program designed to reduce emissions (and therefore energy use). Such a program first inventories in great detail emissions from public buildings, lighting and city vehicles, residential, commercial, industrial and transportation sources. In 1998, Newton took advantage of an intern available through ICLEI (International Council for Environmental Initiatives www.iclei.org) to complete its emissions inventory (copies in the planning department).

Thanks in large part to the persistence of Katherine Gekas and others in the Green Decade Coalition, Newton and MIT are funding the part-time salary of an intern, Amelia Ravin (also a Green Decade member), who will take us through the

next two steps. First, Newton must set a target for emissions reduction, then develop a plan of specific actions that can be implemented to reduce emissions. This work requires coordination and cooperation among many city departments and civic organizations that could effect such policy. The intern will report to the Newton Citizens Commission on Energy, also chaired by Ms. Gekas.

Please join us on Wednesday, March 12, 12:30 - 2:30 pm, at the home of Sandy Butzel, where Katherine Gekas will tell us more about this important program, the cities for climate protection campaign and some plans that have been developed by neighboring communities such as Brookline.

Katherine Gekas has a BS in Economics from U. Wisconsin-Madison and a Master of Science in Environmental Management from Oxford, in the UK. She has worked in the energy and environment field since 1989, including work in Africa and the Middle East on water resources and industrial pollution prevention, in the U.S. on reducing methane emission from coal mines, and in the UK analyzing residential energy use from lighting. ■

Please note the time for the March Daytime Unit Meeting
12:30-2:30 P.M.

League of Women Voters of Newton

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