

League of Women Voters of Newton Newsletter

Volume 8 Issue 8

November/December 2002

A Better Clean Elections Question

By Beth Tietze Lowd

A little-known fact from the recent election is that there was another Clean Elections question (more fairly worded than the statewide Question 3) that was passed by voters in all 11 districts in which it appeared.

The question was, "Shall the state representative from this district be instructed to vote in favor of legislation that would fully implement and fund the state's voter approved Clean Elections Law, which provides a set amount of public funding for candidates who agree to strict fund raising and spending limits." It passed by 62% to 38% overall in those 11 districts, by a total vote of 79,536 to 48,647.

It only appeared in 11 districts because, by the time the Legislature drafted Question 3 and refused to change it to something more complete and clear, there were only a few weeks left for citizens to gather signatures to get another, better question on the ballot. Supporters from Common Cause and Mass. Voters for Clean Elections worked hard and succeeded in getting the new question on the ballot in 11 targeted districts, including the 12th Suffolk, Speaker Thomas Finneran's district. (It passed in his district by 53% to 47%.)

In addition, about 10 towns in Massachusetts, including Amherst, Cambridge, Lincoln, Northampton, Sharon, Stockbridge, Williamstown, and Woburn, actually passed Question 3.

The opponents of the Clean Elections Law raised over \$600,000 to defeat Question 3, mostly in large contributions from corporations, including Fidelity

Investments, John Hancock Insurance, Raytheon, Verizon, and others. Supporters of the Clean Elections Law, which was passed by initiative petition by two thirds of the voters in 1998, hope to use the results from the 11 districts to fight any effort by the Legislature to repeal the law. ■

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City Planning Effort: Workshop Suggests Priorities

By Deb Crossley

The mayor's Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC)* held its first city workshop October 29 to share its work and seek input from the public. Despite stiff competition from the public meeting on the NNHS construction plan suddenly scheduled for the same evening, over eighty citizens signed the roster, including Aldermen Baker, Fischman, Linsky, Mansfield, Samuelson, and Yates. Since forming in May, the CPAC formed five topical groups to examine a spectrum of issues related to its charge*. The five subgroups examined excellence in land use and design; housing and economic diversity; transportation; open space, environmental and energy concerns; development review. Each subgroup gave a brief power point presentation, and proposed up to ten strategies or action items for public consideration. After some public discussion, the public "voted" on the proposals using red dots issued to them on poster boards arranged outside the auditorium.

Materials distributed that evening include much of the work that was presented (but without illustrations), and all of the proposals, which have now been tallied. Additional copies have been available at the planning department, or you can contact me for more information dcrossley@rcn.com.

*CPAC's charge is to develop elements of the Comprehensive Plan, beginning with land use and transportation, to make more concrete and actionable the work of the "Framework for Newton's Planning". Over the summer, the CPAC decided that housing is so central to the work of the other two sections that a housing element should be developed simultaneously. ■

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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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October

The League is always a busy place but I think October is the busiest month of all. Summer's a little quiet. There are primaries to plan for and issues to follow but still it's pretty tame. In September things get going however there's always planning and lead-time. In addition, people are so busy in September, especially all the members who have school aged children or education related jobs. So, then comes October and you have to get out a shoehorn out to fit in everything.

And of course that's just what we did. We held two very successful membership meetings, a unit meeting on the ballot questions, a forum on the future of bilingual education, and a candidate's debate, phew!!! And that was in addition to Harvest Fest, the Legislative Roundtable, and the state league Phonathon and Fall Conference. All the while we continued to observe and speak up for league positions in person and in print. Thank you to everyone who was involved in this variety of events.

Thank you to Beth Lowd, a relative newcomer to the Newton League, whose leadership provided us with a robust presence at the polls on Election Day. She looked after recruiting and scheduling volunteers, along with preparing materials regarding the ballot questions for us to hand out. It was rewarding to see that at least in Newton the bilingual education ballot initiative failed. I like to think we had something to do with that. Also, thank you to Robin Maltz for coordinating rides to the polls.

Finally, Ann Grantham, former league President and current Voters Service Chair has agreed to step into the role of Newsletter Editor for the remainder of the year. I look forward to working closely with Ann and I hope you will feel free to share your suggestions and comments with either one of us.

Amelia Koch

Super Saturday Opportunities

On January 11, 2003, the LWVMA is offering a workshop at Pollard Middle School in Needham that cuts to the heart of Citizen Education. This one day program offers four different topics:

- Moderator Training- become a confident moderator for candidate/issue forums
- Candidate & Issue Forums- formats, ground rules, moderator questions
- Maximizing Voter Service Activities- what more can we do locally?
- How to Run For Office- Learn to train Local Candidates in running for office.

Fee: \$5.00 includes materials, beverages and breakfast pastries. Bring your lunch.

Registration Friday, January 3, 2003

Deadline: Call Ann Grantham 617-964-0333 for more information. ■

Welcome New Members

KATHRYN NEWBURG 15 Harrington St. Newton 02460
(day) 781-642-0025 (eve) 617-964-1421

SUZANNE SOLOMON 23 Kenwood Ave. Newton 02459
s.mculty@rcn.com 617-964-5349

MARCIA KASTNER 25 St. Mary's St. Newton 02462
617-965-5543

VICTORIA POWERS 775 Commonwealth Ave. Newton 02459
powersepost@harvard.edu

Student member:

NATASHA SCHILLER
16 Henshaw St. Newton 02465
617-244-4131 nfatale_365@ivillage.com



All Members

Please check your list in the handbook. If there are corrections or e-mail address additions, send them to robinm@attbi.com

Statement to the Zoning and Planning Committee

**To: The Board of Aldermen
Zoning & Planning Committee,
City of Newton**

**Re: October 16, 2002 Public Hearing
in Conjunction with the Planning
Board on Items #231-02, 285-02,
and 286-02 involving proposals to
rezone areas of the city to reflect
predominant uses.**

The Newton League of Women Voters opposes the proposed rezoning at this time. First, we believe in the value and advantage of long range planning, and support zoning practices consistent with such planning. Sufficient information or context has not been provided so that we may assess the consequences of this proposed rezoning, and whether and how such a change would benefit the city.

Second, although residents in affected properties were provided due notice of this hearing, we think that insufficient information was provided to explain the meaning and consequences of the proposed rezoning designations. Finally, we believe that to the extent possible, housing should be planned to meet the needs of a diverse socioeconomic group. The underlying intent, and overall effect of this proposal is to further restrict development in the city, specifically opportunities for housing units overall, at a time when we face a severe shortage of both low and moderate income affordable housing as well as housing affordable to middle income persons.

There is a mayoral advisory committee currently working to draft a comprehensive plan for the city. Though working with limited city resources, dozens of citizen volunteers, including several aldermen, are in the midst of an open planning process seeking to shape our future city in positive directions, and manage and control future growth and change. (Note Oct 29 public forum) This necessarily involves identifying

areas of the city that need strengthening, where higher density development might bring new vitality to an area, as well as areas of the city which should be protected or preserved as either lower density neighborhoods or as open and recreational space.

Zoning is one very powerful tool communities can use to shape their future. Ideally, the community first draws a plan that identifies shared goals and objectives... then maps strategies for achieving those objectives. Zoning is one strategy that could be used proactively to control and shape development accordingly. It would be short sighted to use zoning regulations strictly in reaction to unwanted development, or as a way of protecting a few citizens from what they do not wish to see next door.

No doubt, as development pressure on our community remains intense, aldermen receive increasing pressure from some constituents to limit or prevent unwanted development in their neighborhoods. However, we question the wisdom of rewriting sections of our zoning code without regard to a plan that works for the city as a whole, but only in response to individual or neighborhood concerns.

With regard to citizen information, it is unclear from the notice provided to those residing in the affected properties, how the rezoning might impact them. The notice suggests the single reason to keep the area as it exists, but does not define specifically what the rezoning will allow. Why were these areas zoned as they are? What would be gained by rezoning? What opportunities may be lost?

This rezoning proposal is one in a long series of zoning amendments Newton has passed in recent years which aim to restrict development in various ways. This one targets housing opportunities, particularly a type of

housing which has the potential to provide affordable units, starter homes for newcomers, and second units for perhaps the parents or children of today's owners, who may need care or simply a fair start.

We are in a housing crisis of unprecedented proportions. Over two decades ago, Newton adopted the so-called "Ten Percent Ordinance" that requires housing developers to set aside 10% of housing proposed as low and moderate income affordable units. After all this time, we have achieved only 4.8% affordable units by those standards, with many of those units imminently threatened by an expiring use clause to revert to market rate. Moreover, the soaring price tag on property in Newton presents an impossible barrier to an increasingly large segment of the working population. Before we propose further limitations on housing development, would it not be wiser to develop and commit to a housing plan incorporating strategies to help Newton become and remain a more stable, economically diverse community?

In sum, our concern is that the rezoning proposal is being made without sufficient context provided to justify a change in local law. It is not that the narrow focus of this proposal is wrong, but that the combined effects over time of zoning proposed to restrict development potential could profoundly shape our city in ways we do not understand, because we have not yet done the homework necessary to make this decision fully informed.

Respectfully,

Amelia Koch, President
Deborah Crossley, Local Action Chair
League of Women Voters of Newton ■

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 e w s l e t t e r

Members	Jane Leighton	Liz Lieberman
	Linda Morrison	Jody Klein
Contact	Andrea Kelley	617964-4609

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

League Activists at the Polls

By Beth Tietze Lowd

Our local League made a difference in Newton on election day by passing out palm cards at all the polling places, advocating that citizens vote NO on question 1, NO on question 2, and YES on question 3. In Newton the repeal of the income tax (1) was defeated 19,159 to 9940; the Unz English immersion question (2) was defeated 15,533 to 14,886; and the use of taxpayer money for political campaigns (Clean Elections in disguise)(3) was narrowly defeated 15,249 to 13,658. So we prevailed on two out of the three. A good day's work! One can only speculate what might have happened had every local League in the state put in the same amount of effort!

The volunteers who helped, most of whom are LWV members, are Anna Maria Abernathy, Mary Adelstein, Lillian Astrachan, Barbara Balasa, Sharon Balfour, Carol Beard, Tammy Bliss, Anita Capeless, Bonnie Carter, Marion Cowan, Marty Cowden, Deb Crossley, Nancy Crowley, Anne Ewart, Lucy Eysenbach, Florence Gans, Barbara Gore, Ann Grantham, Louise Hauser, Barbara Herson, Steffi Aronson Karp, Andrea Kelley, Patty Kellogg, Jody Klein, Amy Koch, Andrea Kozinetz-Holtz, Nancy Levine, Barbara Lietzke, Beth Lowd, Lucia Mayerson-David, Carol McPherson, Jerome Medalie, Susan Neisuler, Susan O'Connell, Fran Osten, Mary Margaret Pappas, Joan Rastegar, Debbie Reisman, Mary Remensnyder, Sharyn Roberts, Sue Rosenbaum, Lynn Scheller, Fran Seasholes, Sondra Shick, Rhona Shoul, Bev Spencer, Janet Stearns, Jennifer Stone, Kit Stover, John Thomas and Dori Zaleznik. Deb Crossley, Bonnie Carter and Elaine Reisman were especially helpful in suggesting people I might call, and Deb and Tammy Bliss helped me deliver the materials. Thanks to all for your activism and your good work, braving the cold to educate voters on election day! ■

Ballot Question 2: English Language Education in Public Schools

By Andrea Kelley and Andrea Kozinetz/ Co-Chairs Educ. Committee

Earlier this fall, The League of Women Voters of Newton sponsored an Educational Forum on Ballot Question 2, which asked the voters of Massachusetts to replace current forms of bilingual education with "English immersion." The Newton League joined the many organizations, including the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, who were opposed to this ballot initiative. As most are now aware, the Ballot question passed. It is certainly too early to assess its impact on Newton or on the cities and towns of Massachusetts. Our thanks to the panel members.

- State Representative Peter Larkin of Pittsfield who is the House Chair of the Joint Committee on Education, Arts & Humanities
- Anne Larner, Chair of the Newton School Committee
- Terasita Tzikas, Bilingual and ESL coordinator for the Newton Public Schools
- Carol Iskols Daynard, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services which includes special education, bilingual and ESL, attendance, health, drug & alcohol education and the Title 1 Programs
- Andrew Ostapchenko a Senior at Newton North who came to Newton from the Ukraine and participated in Newton's bilingual and ESL program.
- Our thanks to Amelia Koch, who served as a capable and thoughtful moderator, fielding questions from the audience to the respective panelist. Our thanks also to our volunteer camera operators; who filmed this presentation for NewTV, Diana Cartier, Bonnie Carter and Joan McGrath. ■

At Odds with the Ends of Zoning and Planning

by Deb Crossley

Concerned about heavy increases in “by right” development in many of Newton’s neighborhoods, the aldermanic Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) created a Task Force to review Section 30-15 of the Newton Zoning Ordinance: “Density/dimensional re-quirements.” The Task Force (aldermen, a local land use attorney and representatives from several city departments) also initiated a process of reviewing existing land use patterns and zoning districts. According to a Planning Department report prepared to inform the 10/16 hearing, the Task Force had determined to work, as much as possible, to:

- Reflect existing realities in the zoning map;
- Create few non-conformities;
- Create few development opportunities;
- Avoid the actuality and appearance of “spot zoning.”

Formed almost one year ago, the “30-15” Task Force drafted a number of proposed modifications to the ordinance, and is holding public hearings on the proposals incrementally. The first hearing held September 30, petitioned an increase in minimum lot size to 3500sf (up from 3000 sf) in multi-residence districts for lots created prior to 12/7/53. At the second hearing, October 16, petitioners proposed changes to the zoning map, and the League voiced con-

cerns about the limited scope of the petition, the process and intent (see full text of statement on page 3). That petition proposes that a total of 67 lots on 12.5 acres (in two separate areas) be rezoned from MR1 (allows two family dwellings, not “multi”) to SR3 (allows only single family dwellings), and a total of 64 lots on 10.4 acres be rezoned from SR3 to MR1. The overall effect of the rezoning would be to reduce opportunities to create additional housing units by way of two family conversions or additions. The dimensional requirements in both zones are the same, therefore developers could still turn a small house into a giant house.

Members of the Task Force at the hearing said that many (rezoning) proposals are forthcoming, but that this one represents the “easiest” of those. This proposal, therefore, was not placed within the context of others nor had it been conceived as part of the comprehensive planning process that is proceeding concurrently. The planning department report notes: “...Although well intentioned, the goal of this process was to replace the present “time-based” zoning classifications for residential zones with “space-based” zoning classifications, without the benefit of a comprehensive view of the City and its future development pattern and evolu-

tion.” And later, in the same report, “it is important that some of the work being pursued by the Task Force become part of the comprehensive planning process.”

This was the essence of our objection. However, our point of view was not well received by the ZAP committee. Our right to speak was called into question by the chair, who interrogated: Did we not know of the Task Force, and why had we not attended their meetings? ...I reminded the aldermen that this was a scheduled public hearing, the purpose of which is of course to hear from the public, and that we had thoughtfully considered our objections. Then our internal process was called into question by Alderman Gentile, which I reviewed. We based our opposition on two longstanding LWV positions (again, see the statement) and our core principal of transparency in government. Legal notice of the hearing was mailed to affected properties only, which contained no intelligible descriptive information or rationale, nor mention of additional information that would be available, such as the Planning Department Report.

If you would like more information on this issue, please call or email 617-244-7597 or dcrossley@rcn.com.



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

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Election Reform

Progress report at the local, state and national levels.

By Bonnie Carter

January unit meetings

Following the election irregularities and errors of the November 2000 election, the League decided to study the administration of elections at all levels. What have we learned? And what has changed?

At the local level, Nancy Criscitiello has been observing the Election Commission and working at the polls on election day. What changes has she seen in the past two years?

At our May 2001 Convention the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts adopted an election study, worded as follows:

Study: To evaluate voting procedures and practices to insure fair and accurate elections in Massachusetts.

Scope: Study may include but is not limited to:

- Review the effectiveness of voting machines, equipment, and systems
- Reviewing the existing election laws related to voting practices and procedures at the polls
- Reviewing the needs of the elderly, disabled, and minorities with respect to the election system

Continued on page 8

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but our work... NEVER!*

What is State Program Planning?

by Bonnie Carter

Program is League jargon for the issues we study. Study usually leads to consensus that is the basis for our positions on issues. The positions are the basis for political action—lobbying, testifying, trying to effect change and influence outcomes both legislative and administrative.

Program planning is the first step in deciding what are the issues the League will study or focus its efforts on.

How do we do program planning?

The League prides itself on being a grassroots organization. For program planning, each local league is invited to submit to the state Program Committee its list of priorities. The state committee will compile the list of suggestions and submit it to the state Board. The state Board weighs the responses and decides which issues it will recommend to the State Convention. At the State Convention, delegates from the local leagues vote to adopt the program for the coming biennium. State and national conventions are held in alternate years—2002 was the year for national program and convention, 2003 is the year for state program planning and convention. The local level of the League adopts program each year at Annual Meeting.

This year, state program planning will take place at the LMVN January Unit Meetings. ■



Cont. from page 7 **Election Reform**

- Reviewing voting practices and procedures that include training and compensation for poll workers and assure adequate instruction and assistance to voters before the election and at the polls.

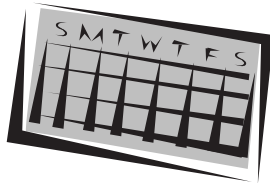
The LWVMA committee on Election Reform, chaired by Carma Forgie of Arlington, has been conducting this study. Bonnie Carter has attended many meetings of the committee and will report on its findings.

The LWVUS has been researching the administration of elections and has tried to promote positive change. Sue Rosenbaum has been following election reform for the LWV of Newton and will help us see the broad picture.

We hope you can attend one of the unit meetings! ■

2003 LWV Engagement Calendars

- Wall or desk calendars from LWV of St. Louis, MO have an 8 1/2" x 11" page for each month, with large blocks for each day to write in appointments.
- Price \$3 each.
- Call Priscilla Leith at 617-969-6837. ■



LWVN CALENDAR

December

- 8 Sunday, Holiday Party, 5-8 pm at Barbara Lietzke's, 83 Kirkstall Rd, Newtonville, 617-332-8630.
- 11 Wednesday, Working Board Meeting/ Newsletter Deadline
- 18 Wednesday, Board Meeting at Elaine Reisman's.

January

- 8 Wednesday, 11:30 – 1:30 p.m., Unit Meeting Election Reform at the National Level and State Program Planning at Jane Leighton's, 31 Colgate Rd. Newton Lower Falls, 617-527-4018
- 9 Thursday, 7:30-9:30, Unit Meeting, Election Reform at the National Level and State Program Planning, at Deb Hirschs', 49 Olde Field Rd, Newton Centre, 617-965-1475
- 11 Saturday, LWVMA Voter Service Super Saturday, 9:30-3:00, Needham
- 15 Working Board Meeting/Newsletter Deadline
- 29 Wednesday, Board Meeting

February

- 12 Wednesday, 11:30-1:30 p.m., Unit Meeting, Affordable Housing
- 12 Working Board Meeting/ Newsletter Deadline
- 13 Thursday, 7:30- 9:30 p.m., Unit Meeting, Affordable Housing
- 26 Wednesday, Board Meeting

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