

LWVN 2010-2011 Program Planning - Committee Reports/Proposals:

Local Program Planning Meetings:

Wednesday, March 10, 11:30am-1:30pm and Wednesday, March 17, 7:00-9:00pm, at NewTV

LOCAL ACTION:

Continue to support restructuring into a Local Action/Program & Action umbrella with committees that do observing and action (i.e., education, environmental issues, municipal finance, housing, etc.)

AD HOC COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Continue to monitor the Community Preservation Committee (CPC).

EDUCATION COMMITTEE:

Gail Glick and Sue Flicop, Co-Chairs

1. Educate Newton citizens as to the findings published by the CAG about its analysis of the Newton Public Schools' (NPS) budgetary and operational structure.
2. Study and facilitate civic discussions around the various recommendations/options for possible systemic change; and to identify and advocate for those changes that assure feasible implementation, cost-effectiveness, and significant benefit and improvement – in both scope and scale – to the school system.
3. LWVN-Ed can provide an essential service to the community-at-large by acting as a facilitator to the ongoing and wide-ranging "conversation" about the direction of Newton Schools and the many anticipated proposals, measures, and recommendations through forums and other means of communication and education.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES COMMITTEE:

Lucia Dolan and Beth Lowd, Co-Chairs

1. Continue efforts to monitor and support single stream recycling and pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) in Newton.
2. Support implementation of the Comprehensive Plan's Transportation and Mobility section
3. Safe Sidewalks: Continue to work towards improving pedestrian mobility in Newton, including an ordinance to require residents to clear snow from sidewalks, and to support enforcement of existing snow ordinances.
4. Explore supporting statewide plastic bag tax or ban
5. Begin educating ourselves about Water Quality Issues in Newton

CHARTER STUDY COMMITTEE:

Sandy Butzel and Rhanna Kidwell, Co-Chairs

(Held until April Consensus Meetings)

HOUSING COMMITTEE:

Leslie Burg and Myra Tattenbaum, Co-Chairs

- Continue to promote passage of Accessory Apartment (AA) amendments and a study of building lot size and dimensional requirements to encourage increased expansion of rental housing through creation of legal AA's.
- Support of the work of UCHAN, which has absorbed Housing Action Plan Initiative (HAPI) and assumed its action function, as well as other housing organizations in Newton to promote affordable housing throughout the city. This includes support of 40B provisions presently in place and opposition to the proposed ballot initiative that would invalidate it.
- Since housing, development, zoning, and land use are interdependent, the Housing Committee should expand its function to include the consideration of development in the city. Therefore, we recommend a LWVN Committee on Housing and Development replace the current Housing Committee to allow that expanded function.
- We also support a formal study of LWVN positions on land use, zoning and development likely to be recommended by the *ad hoc* committee established by Andrea Kelley that is reviewing them now.

ELECTION COMMISSION TASK FORCE:

Nancy Criscitiello and Ellen Glusman, Co-Chairs

Continue the work of the Joint Election Commission Task Force in its collaboration with Craig Manseau, Secretary of the Election Commission, of looking at ways to improve the recruitment and evaluation of poll workers.

MUNICIPAL FINANCE:

George Foord, Chair

Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB):

Newton, not unlike other cities and towns in Massachusetts and throughout the United States, has for many years included pensions, retiree health benefits and Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) as part of total compensation in order to attract and retain qualified employees.

While it is required to and does regularly appropriate money in order to actuarially fund its future pension costs; at present it provides for retiree health and other OPEB benefits only as costs arise, on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Effective with FY 2008, however, Newton was required by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) to begin disclosing both on its balance sheet and in its income statement an increasing portion of the unfunded OPEB liability. At least for now, however, GASB, while recommending that it do so, does not require that Newton fund its OPEB liability.

This practice is unsustainable. For example, for FY 2009, Newton appropriated more than \$14 million for OPEB costs on a pay-as-you-go basis, while failing to set aside any money for the \$33 million net increase in its unfunded liability for the same year. As of the end of FY 2009, Newton had disclosed on its balance sheet nearly \$55 million of a much larger \$595 million unfunded liability. The actuarially determined Annual Required Contribution (ARC) to pay all OPEB costs related to FY 2009 was \$47 million, the sum of the pay-as-you-go amount and the increase in the unfunded liability for the same year. Until it begins to fund its OPEB liability, Newton will reflect in its financial statements a rapidly increasing liability and related charges to its income statement.

As its primary programmatic objective for at least the 2010 - 2011 fiscal year, the Municipal Finance Committee, will seek to influence Newton's early commitment to full funding of its unfunded OPEB liability by pursuing the following plan:

- o Establish employee benefit OPEB trust. New Section 20 of Chapter 32B of the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL), enacted as Chapter 479 of the Acts of 2008, now includes a local option to establish the required revocable trust in lieu of the pursuit of a home rule petition. A docket item to adopt this new provision has been drafted and is ready for submission to the Board of Aldermen. At an appropriate time this item, which would accept the new section, should be passed. If this action were to be taken, absent funding, then, the revocable trust would be in a state of readiness pending a separate decision to fund the trust. The City of Cambridge recently accepted the provisions of the new section and will join Wellesley, Waltham, and a growing list of other cities and towns taking concrete action to address their respective unfunded OPEB liabilities.
- o Pursue the docketing of an item to begin funding of the OPEB trust previously established. Pre-funding, depending upon the amount of contribution appropriated, would permit use of actuarial calculations for fully- or partially-funded plans - which are more desirable than those for unfunded plans - and would reduce the amount of total unfunded liability and the amount of annual adjustment required to be disclosed by the city in its financial statements. A further benefit is that the more fully-funded the trust the proportionally smaller the contribution required to be made by the city. Various potential funding sources would need to be identified which would ease the need for large operating budget appropriations. The City of Cambridge, as a companion docket to its acceptance of Chapter 479 of the Acts of 2008, appropriated \$2 million from operations to begin pre-funding.
- o Plan design changes should be identified, permitted either under current law or by home rule petition, which would have the result of reducing further the amount of contribution required to be made by the city, if incorporated in collective bargaining agreements.
- o Negotiation through the collective bargaining process would be required for the adoption of recommended plan changes.

Campaign Finance Best Practices:

A principal purpose of the Campaign Finance laws is to create a real opportunity for demonstrated transparency between candidates for elective office and the public. It is in the Campaign Finance Reports that the candidate discloses sources of contributions to their campaign and how the money was spent. Accurate and timely reporting of campaign activities should, at a minimum, help to assure the public that campaigns are conducted within statute and regulation intended to assure compliance, reassure the public, and build and or restore confidence in the electoral process.

In order to improve the working of the rules in Newton, the Municipal Finance Committee will endeavor to undertake the following:

- o Establish a list of Certified Public Accountants who presently serve as campaign treasurers and who accordingly have established professional credentials, independence, and a code of professional conduct for performing the responsibilities

of handling campaign funds as well as the accurate and timely preparation and filing of Campaign Finance Reports. An effort will be made to form a CPA working committee for purposes of mutual support, determination of issues encountered during the conduct of political campaigns requiring remediation, and the establishment of best practices for the role of Campaign Treasurer.

o Engage the Massachusetts Society of Certified Public Accountants (MSCPA) and the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) in discussion intended to result in increasing the presence of CPAs as campaign treasurers and thereby increasing the professionalism of that role; including the identification and addressing of issues and concerns inconsistent with the requirements of independence and the code of professional conduct.

o Engage the Mayor, Board of Aldermen, and School Committee both formally and informally as well as through opportunity for education related to the campaign finance laws and campaign reporting in order to establish the purpose of the laws, establish best practices for adherence to them and the creation of a climate among elected officials supportive of the spirit as well the rule of the campaign finance statutes and regulations.

AD HOC LAND USE POSITIONS REVIEW RESOURCE COMMITTEE

Andrea Kelley, Chair; Members: Leslie Burg, Deb Crossley, Matt Cuddy, Priscilla Leith, Carol Ann Shea, John Sisson, Chris Steele, Myra Tattenbaum

In February and March 2010, a resource committee of the above-named nine members met, discussed and researched existing LWVN positions that relate to land use. The goal is to give the LWVN a more updated knowledge and position base on which to do education and advocacy in the near future.

The committee strongly recommends that Local Program Planning vote to include a League Study of Land Use-Related Positions as a Priority Program area for the 2010-2011 year.

Three tiered recommendations have emerged from the resource committee:

- *Positions that can easily be changed, updated, edited at Annual Meeting 2010:*
 - Charter, p.26 and Planning in the Community p. 39, change the wording from “support the adoption of a Comprehensive Plan” to “support the implementation and regular updating of the Newton Comprehensive Plan”;
 - Zoning, p.39 “Support modification of zoning ordinances”: research and correct the proper subcategories of a, b, c, d, e, f, and g, as there appears to be a cut and paste error where b = e, and c = f.
- *Position(s) that can be deleted due to being outdated/defunct at Annual Meeting:*
 - Fiscal Policy, p.26 delete the Revenue Sharing Money position, as it is defunct
- *Adopt a local League Study and determine Consensus*, undertaken to look in more depth at land use related issues that are in positions entitled: Charter, Fiscal Policy, Housing, Zoning, Planning in the Community, Redevelopment, Rehabilitation and Conservation, Closed School Facilities and Environmental Quality. This is expected to take a year.

Additionally, it is suggested that the LWVN overview all its positions as they are currently listed to reduce redundancy and check for any other oversights or typos/errors. This is not a program priority but is a short-term administrative function the Board could undertake.

There exists the man/woman power to do this; most current members of the resource committee are interested and available to continue. Additionally, other committee members will be sought and encouraged to participate. This effort is not expected to drain significant time from the Board.

A balanced study is planned, including community research and information gathering, informing members through the newsletter, and at least one member informational meeting. That meeting will most likely to occur next winter. Reaching a new position or positions may take place at that meeting or a later one, no later than spring 2011. The work of the committee will begin as soon after a vote at Annual Meeting as possible. Research and collecting information may continue prior to that.

Current state and national positions will continue to be researched; to be sure any possible changes will be in compliance with them.

The Study will include League and non-League members, including potentially those in the community with related expertise such as Planning and Development Director, Aldermanic Chair of Land Use and/or Zoning and Planning Committee, professional planners etc.