

Newsletter

Volume 16, Issue 5

visit us online at www.lwvnewton.org

August 2010

FALL FORUMS ON STORM WATER MANAGEMENT

by Priscilla Leith

Remember the March, 2010 floods in Newton? What happened and why? What can we do to mitigate such disasters in the future, in view of global climate change? What do knowledgeable people know and suggest? The LWV of Newton, with the Newton Free Library, Green Decade/Newton, Newton History Museum, and Newton Conservators as co-sponsors will present two forums to delve into these and other questions.

Background

Floods struck sections of Newton back in 1918, 1938, and 1955. Then, they struck again in the 1960s, just as concerns about the environment were taking hold, so the League of Women Voters decided to do something about it. Studies done at the state level enabled Leagues to support the Hatch Act of 1971, which protected inland wetlands from development. Wetlands act as natural sponges during floods and periods of heavy rain, absorbing rain and runoff so that it will percolate down through the ground into underground aquifers, where it goes into the rivers – in our case, the Charles – or provides well water for drinking. Local Leagues in the Charles River basin worked with the US Army Corps of Engineers on an in-depth study of the Charles, resulting in recommendations that the State and/or local municipalities purchase critical wetlands, designated as Natural Valley Storage Areas, to protect them from any development and provide shelter for wildlife. The Charles River Watershed Association was formed to continue efforts to protect the River and its watershed.

In 1971 the LWVN testified and lobbied actively for the Board of Aldermen to pass the Flood Plain Zoning Amendment to protect certain areas in the city. Testimony given **September 21, 1971** states:

“Recent history shows that the development of these areas has caused severe damage to house and property. Flooding of cellars, overflowing of storm drains, back-up of sewage have been the inevitable consequences of ill-placed development. Also, as the capacity for storage is lost, the increased runoff which results can produce more severe

flooding downstream, and we in Newton have felt the effects of building in the flood plains of Needham and other communities as well as in our own.

“In Newton alone, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent on flood-control projects, which are financed half by the city and half by the state. A flood control project on Parker Street cost \$450,000. One in the Homer Street area which involved Hammond Brook and was undertaken to protect City Hall, cost \$400,000. Another \$300,000 project is planned for Waban in the Dresser Brook area. These projects are only partially successful. There is still water in the cellars and storm drains still overflow.”

Storm Water Management, Part One: The Floods Last Time – In over our heads?

Bob Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Charles River Watershed Association, will address the need to look at the entire watershed when considering flooding in Newton. He will characterize the river; its hydrology and geology, especially the drainage function of the River; and how Newton’s sewers and drains contribute to the Charles’ problems of pollution and low flow.

Tom Daley, who is Newton’s Commissioner of Public Works, has been asked to explain how drainage works, describing the March, 2010 flooding and storm sewer overflows, how storm drains operate and where they go, and how the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit is administered locally.

Fred Abernathy, Emeritus Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Harvard School of Engineering directed a 1999 study on Newton Sewer System Inflow and Infiltration (I/I). He will explain how Newton’s sewers are constructed, the problems that inflow and infiltration present, how to diagnose them, how we can fix them and what will happen if we do, what causes sanitary sewer overflows (SSO’s), how the system can be maintained, and more.

Once we know answers to all or most of the above, the big

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To receive an **audio version** of this Newsletter, call Anne Borg at 617-244-6366.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization. Regular membership is open to all citizens (men and women) of voting age; associate membership is open to young people and noncitizens. Your annual dues give you membership in local, state and national leagues.

For more information about the League of Women Voters, including information on joining us, call 617-964-0014 or visit www.lwvnewton.org.

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Public Forums: Storm Water Management

What caused the floods in the Spring of 2010? What can be done to prevent future flooding? How can Newton optimize storm water management in view of global warming and climate change? Learn the answers to these and more questions at two free public forums:

Part One: The Floods Last Time - In Over Our Heads?

Tuesday, September 21, 2010

Part Two: The Floods Next Time - Do We Need an Ark?

Tuesday, October 26, 2010

Both forums begin at 7pm at the Newton Free Library

Co-sponsored by LWVN, Newton Free Library, Green Decade/Newton, Newton Conservators, and Newton History Museum.

For more information, contact info@lwvnewton.org or 617-964-0014

August 26 is Women's Equality Day

In 1971, the US Congress designated August 26 as "Women's Equality Day." The date was chosen because it was on this day in 1920 that the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, granting women the right to vote, was ratified. This August 26 marks the 90th anniversary of the amendment's ratification. The League of Women Voters was founded the same year that women achieved this right, and celebrates Women's Equality Day by remembering this historic achievement, and looking forward to greater civic participation and healthy debate on the issues that matter most to our communities.

Letter from the Leadership

August, 2010

Dear League Members,

We hope this issue finds you enjoying some relief from the dog days of summer and anticipating the cooler, but ever busier, days of fall. Since our installation in June, the Leadership Team has been meeting regularly to both map out the individual tasks and duties of the Team members as well as to identify ways of refining our organizational systems with the goal of enhancing the work we do as a League. To this end, we have been exploring ways to improve coordination and communication among the various LWVN committees in planning upcoming activities and events; reviewing our local League policies and practices and, where necessary and practicable, suggesting limited updates or revisions to particular provisions; considering ways to encourage more active participation in League activities amongst our membership; and assembling a calendar of upcoming League-sponsored events.

To be specific, we met with Mayor Setti Warren to

explore the potential for League participation, where appropriate, on city commissions, task forces and advisory boards. We scheduled Board meetings in June, July and August, during which the Board conducted its annual review of the LWVN's non-partisan policy and voted to approve certain revisions (see related article on Nonpartisan Policy for 2010-2011). The Team anticipates that a review of the LWVN's Coalition/Co-Sponsorship Policy will be on the Board's agenda in the near future, and we are planning a training session in League Basics for all interested LWVN members in hopes of acquainting our newer members with essential League procedures and policies. Finally, we have been providing oversight assistance to the LWVN Committees that will be hosting major Fall events: namely, the Environmental Committee's Flood Water Forum and the Voter Service Committee's Fall Election Debates and Voters' Guide.

All in all, the Leadership Team is looking forward to a dynamic, exciting year.

LWVN Non-Partisan Policy 2010-2011

According to LWVN procedures, the Board of Directors must review and vote on a Nonpartisan Policy annually. At the Board meeting in June, the Nonpartisan Policy was reviewed and approved. It mirrors that of 2009-2010 with specific revisions: the exclusion for engaging in visible support of political candidates was expanded to include any Co-Presidents and/or Leadership Team, and eliminated for the Education Committee Chair and Local Action Chair. The current Nonpartisan Policy is printed in its entirety below.

Purpose. The purpose of this policy is to enable the League as an organization to carry on with service to voters, information to citizens and lobbying and campaigning on issues. The policy distinguishes between the League as an organization and the rights of its individual members.

General. The League of Women Voters of Newton is a nonpartisan organization that does not support or oppose any political party or candidate. The League's effectiveness lies in its ability to take strong positions on issues in the public interest without regard for partisan affiliation. The League also encourages participation in local government by informing the citizens of Newton about their rights and responsibilities as voters.

The Policy as it applies to Members. The League prides itself on having a membership composed of diverse, informed women and men. Its individual members are encouraged to participate fully in party politics and in government at all levels. Many League members have strong affiliations with political parties or candidates, or are elected officials themselves.

The Policy as it applies to Board Members. The President, Co-Presidents and/or Leadership Team, Voter Service Chair, and Newsletter Editor shall not engage in visible support of political candidates. Board members should use discretion to ensure that their personal political activities are not identified with the League in the public mind. Candidate for any elected office and their campaign managers cannot serve on the LWVN Board of Directors. If any questions arise regarding the nonpartisan policy, the matter will come before the Board for interpretation and discussion. If a Board member resigns from the Board because of a conflict with this policy, that member shall not return to the Board until after the next Annual Meeting. Final decisions about implementing this nonpartisan policy rest with the Board of Directors.

Walk Newton!

By Lucia Dolan

Walking is a think local, act local issue. Residents of walkable communities are healthier, more active, and spend less on transportation. Homes in walkable neighborhoods are worth more than similar homes in less walkable neighborhoods. Walkable communities with mass transit connections, like Newton, maintain the highest housing values of all. Planning, development, and funding of infrastructure for walking (sidewalks, crosswalk lights, etc.) is mainly done locally.

Last spring the League of Women Voters and Newton's Planning Department co-sponsored a study on improving pedestrian mobility in Newton. Four college students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute spent a semester observing pedestrian patterns, interviewing local residents and assessing pedestrian infrastructure in Newton Corner, Newton Centre, West Newton and the Route 9 Chestnut Hill area. We asked them to focus on improving safety, for safety is one of the leading reasons people choose not to walk. Many of their specific suggestions were shockingly simple, such as fixing the angle of a walk light so pedestrian can view it from the sidewalk. Their full report can be found at www.lwvnewton.org. Replays of a forum where the students discuss their findings are running on NewTV's Red Channel (check www.newtv.org for times). Below is a summary of their citywide recommendations.

WPI Citywide Recommendations

- **Right-on-Red:** Right-on-red turns present a safety issue to pedestrians, even when using the walking light. Our recommendation to those right-on-red turns that present challenges to pedestrians are eliminating the right-on-red turn, installing a traffic signal that reads "No Turn on Red" when the walking light is in use, or implementing *leading interval lights* that will provide a buffer for the pedestrian to cross lanes before vehicular travel in any direction can begin again.
- **Earlier Seasonal Maintenance:** Sidewalks and crosswalks should be maintained earlier in the spring. This will minimize the time that debris and poor visibility affect safety and accessibility in Newton. This recommendation is directed towards Newton's Department of Public Works, who is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of these facilities.
- **Improve Crosswalk Painting:** In order to improve crosswalk painting, hatching or solid colors should be

used. These will improve visibility and therefore the safety of pedestrians.

- **Install Curb Cuts for Each Crosswalk:** A common regulation violation that we found during our work in Newton was one curb cut that accommodated more than one crosswalk. According to the American with Disabilities Act, each crosswalk must have its own curb cut, meaning it cannot be shared with another crosswalk. By installing curb cuts at each crosswalk location, this will help ensure safe and accessible pedestrian crossings.
- **Install Perpendicular Crosswalks at Intersections:** Throughout the four study areas, we noticed many crosswalks that are diagonal. Diagonal crosswalks can be more convenient for pedestrians because they could provide a more direct path to their destinations. However, these present a serious safety issue, because diagonal crosswalks cause longer interaction time between motorists and pedestrians. Due to this, curb cuts should be installed directly across from one another in order to allow a straight crosswalk for pedestrians.
- **Install Medians in Necessary Locations to avoid Long Crosswalks:** In all locations, long periods of pedestrian-vehicle interaction should be avoided to help improve pedestrian mobility. Installing medians at crosswalks that are long will provide safety for pedestrians by allowing a place in the middle of the crosswalk to separate the pedestrian from vehicular traffic.
- **Replace Brick Walkways with Pressed Concrete:** Brick can be a hazardous surface therefore as it degrades pressed concrete should be used as a replacement. Pressed concrete is a cheaper and safer material and still possesses much of the same aesthetics as brick.
- **Improve Bus Stops:** At bus stops throughout the city, where able, full shelters and bike racks should be added. These will increase aesthetics and also encourage the use of these stops.

The League would like to thank WPI students Caitlyn Shaddock, Jeff Greenwood, Cory Alemian, and Michael Oliveri and their advising professors Richard Vaz and Chrysanthe Demetry for all their efforts in creating this study. We would also like to thank David Koses, Ben Solomon and Candace Havens from the Newton Planning Department for their help guidance; and Ellen Meyers of the Newton Free Library and Jesse Kreitzer from NewTV for hosting and filming the Walk Newton! forum.

LWVUS 49th National Convention – Celebrating the 90th Anniversary of the LWV

by Ellen Glusman and Lucia Dolan

June 11-15, 2010, Atlanta, GA

This year's national convention held in Atlanta, GA, had over 700 delegates attend, representing 45 states & the District of Columbia. LWV of Newton sent 3 voting delegates – Anne Borg, Lucia Dolan, and Ellen Glusman. In addition, Terry Yoffie attended as a delegate of LWVMA.

The days were filled with an assortment of Caucuses and Workshops that started at 7:30 AM each day, had all-morning or all-afternoon Plenary Sessions, and post-dinner Caucuses and Workshops covering a wide variety of informational and educational topics, as well as networking sessions for large and small local leagues.

After much lively debate the following actions were approved:

Two studies were adopted:

- A study of the federal role in public education. The study will focus on the role of the federal government in education policymaking, with possible consideration of funding, common standards and/or governance relationships among all levels of the government. The scope will be dependent on available resources, including committee and LWVUS staff time.
- A study on privatization: the policy agenda to transfer government functions, services and assets to the private sector.

The following positions were adopted by concurrence on the convention floor:

- An updated Arms Control Position.
- An addition to the LWVUS position on selection of the president: "We support the use of the National Popular Vote Compact as one acceptable way to achieve the goal of the direct popular vote for election of the president until the abolition of the Electoral College is accomplished.
- An addition to the LWVUS Equality of Opportunity position: "The League of Women Voters of the United States supports equal rights for all under state and federal law. The LWVUS supports legislation to equalize the legal rights, obligations, and benefits available to same-gender couples with those available to heterosexual couples. LWVUS supports legislation to permit same-gender couples to marry under civil law. The League believes that the civil status of marriage is already clearly distinguished from the religious institution of marriage and that religious rights will be preserved.

Convention also supported the following resolutions:

- To support lifting the travel restrictions for Americans going to Cuba.
- To call upon the Board to use the resources of the League to support and lobby for significant strengthening of appropriate regulation, oversight, inspection, and penalties associated with the development of fossil fuel resources. This strengthening should include elimination from national legislation of the exemptions for drilling and mining, as well as additional legislation requiring the federal agencies to regulate drilling and mining in a manner consistent with the preservation of a healthy environment. We also call on the Board to communicate with the President and the Congress putting them on notice that Leagues across the country are deeply concerned about this issue.
- To call upon the Senate to change its rules to limit the use of the filibuster.
- To add the principle of TRANSPARENCY to the SARA Resolution, as adopted by the LWVUS Convention of 2005. Revised to include the following Principles: Security; Accuracy; Recountability; Accessibility; and Transparency.
- To call upon the LWVUS Board to advocate strongly for bills that legislate for improved Medicare for all.
- To call upon the LWVUS to highlight the need for those responsible for the oil spill to be held accountable. Further, the LWVUS demands that our government hold those responsible for the environmental disaster accountable for the clean-up. The LWVUS further urges the legislative and executive branches of the federal government to immediately take all necessary steps to maximize to the extent practicable the ability and efforts of all relevant federal agencies and departments to take action, and to work with the U.S. coastal states and communities most directly and immediately affected, to respond creatively, efficiently and effectively to the environmental, health and economic crisis created by the oil flowing from the out of control BP oil well in the Gulf of Mexico and by the efforts to contain and disperse it.

Several changes were made to the Bylaws

- Article III, Sec. 2 A (3), Membership, was amended by striking out the word HONORARY before the words life members. The bylaw will then read "those who have been members of the League for 50 years or more shall be

“Convention,” Continued from page 5

“Storm Water,” Continued from page 1

life members excused from the payment of dues. (Note: All Leagues must conform their bylaws to this change.)

- Article IX, Sec. 4, Convention Powers, Article X, Sec. 4, Council, Powers, Article XIII, Sec. 3 and 4, Financial Administration were amended to provide that a biennial budget would be adopted at Convention, starting in 2012. (See updated bylaws at this link.)

And one major change to the Budget

The proposed PMP rate of \$29.60 was increased to \$29.70 for 2010-2011 by a motion on the convention floor. The PMP rate of \$30.00 for 2011-2012 was adopted as proposed.

The Plenary Sessions included out-going President Mary Wilson’s “State of the League” address, presentation of the proposed program, proposed 2010-2011 LWVUS/EF Budgets. There was also a panel of former LWVUS Presidents, and the introduction of former LWVUS national Board members. Addresses to the delegates by Civil Rights Leader and Congressman John Lewis and The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius, US Secretary of Health and Human Services, were highlights of the Convention, and can be read online.

See www.lwv.org for many of the discussion and presentations.

Elisabeth MacNamara was elected President LWVUS, and announced that she would begin visiting many of the state and local leagues (and was in Boston last month).

WELCOME

New Members!

- Jennifer Parker Baker, Newton Centre
- Jo Corro, Newon Upper Falls
- Barbara Darnell, Newton Highlands
- Susan Leeman, Newton
- Taube Sack Nadler, Newton Centre
- Irwin Young, West Newton

questions are What Next? How much will that cost? And, how do we pay for it?

Storm Water Management, Part Two: The Floods Next Time – Do we need an Ark?

Ellen Douglas is a hydrologist and is Assistant Professor of Environmental, Earth and Social Sciences at the University of Massachusetts-Boston. We are asking her to speak about managing storm water pollution, what cities and towns can/should do to better manage the expected floods, discuss current EPA regulations and those coming down in the near future.

Bob Rooney, Chief Operating Officer of the City of Newton, will discuss new federal regulations on storm water management, how they impact on Newton, how we will pay for them, capital improvements needed to our wastewater infrastructure, what citizens will be required to do in the future, and what LWVN and other organizations can do to help.

And, Martin Pillsbury, the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, will speak to “Green roofs”, permeable pavement, rain gardens, and what individual homeowners and businesses can do to mitigate storm water runoff.

The Water Sub-committee, an offshoot of the LWVN’s Environmental Committee, has been working since April to plan these forums. Members include Priscilla Leith, Chair; Mary Adelstein, Vice Chair; Lucia Dolan; Alison Leary; Lois Levin; Deb Crossley; Sharyn Roberts; and Dede Vittori.

Co-sponsors of the forums are the Newton Free Library, the Newton History Museum, Green Decade/Newton, and the Newton Conservators.

In Memoriam: Rose Davis

We are sorry to note the passing of LWVN member Rose Davis on July 5. Pat Acton let us know that “Rose joined LWVN around 10 years ago or so. She served with me and a few other members on the committee that ‘resurrected’ topic meetings, called ‘unit’ meetings at the time. Rose had been a President, I believe, of the Braintree League and was a lovely person. I called her to invite her to attend annual meeting a year or two ago and she said that her husband had died and she was pursuing other things now, more leisurely activities. I never did get her to attend another meeting, but was surprised to see her death. She was a very nice woman.”

Speaking with one Voice

The League's hallmark is its grassroots approach to program development and the adopting of "positions" at the national, state, and local levels. Once positions are adopted and are part of the League program, they are re-endorsed regularly. Local positions are voted on at annual meeting; state and national positions are voted at the respective convention.

The League, at all levels, can then take action on its positions. National positions apply at all levels; state positions may be used at both state and local levels; and action on local positions is confined to local communities.

Action can take place in different ways; several are listed below:

- lobbying for changes in a law,
- letter writing,
- email and telephone campaigns to officials and other policy-makers,
- drafting new laws and ordinances,
- testifying at hearings,
- participating in public forums,
- monitoring and observing governmental bodies

Speaking with One Voice

"Speaking with one voice" is one of the most important tenets of the League. The national League is responsible for determining strategies and action policies that ensure that the League's message on national issues is consistent throughout the country. Similarly, state Leagues are responsible for a consistent state message, and local Leagues must cooperate to ensure that regional issues are addressed in a consistent matter by neighboring Leagues.

Taking Action in the Community

The local League board is responsible for setting priorities and goals for the organization. The League

makes decisions carefully, following procedures established over many decades on the national, state, and local levels. While this means that the League can take longer than other organizations to come to a decision, most League members believe that this approach ensures thoughtful and meaningful action.

Issues or requests for action usually come through one of our subcommittees, although individual members (or groups that aren't formal committees) are welcome to propose actions as well. For example, a committee might decide that it wants to write a letter to the Board of Aldermen or the *Newton Tab* to lobby in support of, or opposition to, a particular item. (Note that such letters are always signed by the current League president/spokesperson, and not by the person who actually writes it.)

Proposals for action must be presented to the board for approval. When an action falls under one of our existing positions, the proposal cites the position the action supports and the reasons action is needed. The board then votes to decide whether to take a particular action.

League members are encouraged to contact their local officials, write letters to the editor, testify at hearings, etc., regarding League priority issues, as long as it is clear that they are speaking as **individuals**, *not for the League (i.e., they should not mention that they are League members in their communications)*. Again, it is important to remember that only the League president/spokesperson is permitted to speak for the League in an official capacity, unless she/he designates another member to speak.

Information taken from: LWVUS League Basics, LWVMA Handbook for Members, and LWVN website.

Renewal Packet and 2010-2011 Handbook Coming Soon!

September is LWVN's annual renewal month: please do us the favor of returning your renewal form promptly! This year, you'll also receive the new LWVN Handbook, featuring updated contact information for all local members as well as general information about the LWVN and Newton city government. The Handbook is published every other year, so be sure to put your copy in a safe place.

LWVN CALENDAR

AUGUST

- 19th Thurs., 9:45am. **LWVN “Archive Mornings.”**
First Baptist Church, Newton Centre.

- 26th Thurs., 9:45am. **LWVN “Archive Mornings.”**
First Baptist Church, Newton Centre.

→ *Don't forget to check our online calendar for any late-breaking changes!*
www.lwvnewton.org

SEPTEMBER

- 1st Wed., 7:00pm, **LWVN Board Meeting**, TBA.

- 2nd Thurs., 9:45am. **LWVN “Archive Mornings.”**
First Baptist Church, Newton Centre.

- 8th Wed., 11:30am **LWVN Topic Meeting**

- 13th Mon., 7pm, **Water Subcommittee** meeting,
Priscilla Leith's house.

- 17th Fri., 9am, **Environmental Committee**
meeting, Lucia Dolan's house

- 21st Tue., 7:00pm. **LWVN Forum - Storm Water Management: Part One.** Newton Free Library.

League of Women Voters of Newton

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