

Subject: December 2010 Bulletin
Date: Wednesday, December 1, 2010 1:30 PM
From: League of Women Voters of Andover/North Andover <league@lww-andovers.org>
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To: Kerri Ford kerriford@verizon.net
Conversation: December 2010 Bulletin



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF ANDOVER/NORTH ANDOVER**

Bulletin

www.lww-andovers.org

December 2010

Bulletin Editor: Ann Cobleigh
President: Kerri Ford

Vol. 16 No. 9
Published Monthly September - May

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President's Letter

By Kerri Ford

I hope you all were able to spend relaxing time with family and friends over the Thanksgiving holiday. This time of year is busy for us all but I hope you will be able to set aside some time to join your fellow League members at a couple of events this month.

For Andover residents, the first event is Andover's Special Town Meeting, which will be held on Monday, December 6 at 7:00p.m. at Andover High School. Andover voters will be asked to vote on the proposed building of a new Bancroft Elementary School, two land-purchase transactions, and a land easement. Town Meetings are an integral part of the Town's government and only work with voter participation. I encourage you to attend and be a part of this uniquely New England process. Your vote counts!

The second event is the League's annual Holiday Dinner, which will be held on Wednesday, December 8 at 6:00p.m. at The Log Cabin at Phillips Academy. At the Holiday Dinner we will celebrate the League's 90th anniversary with a presentation by the 90th Anniversary Committee. The Committee is chaired by Pat Edmonds and also includes Rusty Dunbar, Tina Girdwood, Stefani Traina, Nancy Gump, Nancy Mulvey, and Gail Ralston. Heather Holman and Ann Cobleigh are co-chairing the Dinner. Thank you in advance to all of these wonderful women for the time they have spent over the last several months organizing what promises to be a great evening for us all.

Molly Bicking once again organized the League's precincting effort for the November election. It was a very busy day at the polls and the Andover community really seems to appreciate the League's efforts on election days. Thank you of course to Molly and also to Cynthia Barakatt, Stefani Traina, Heather Holman, Ann Cobleigh, Florence Feldman-Wood, Susan Stott, Becci Backman, Joan Duff (who I had the pleasure of spending my two hours at the table with), Ellen

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Sebasky, Liz Elowe, Heather Holman, Amy Janovsky, and Michael Frishman who volunteered their time at the polls.

Also during November, the League once again sponsored the Community Read-Along and co-sponsored the Town of Andover Mid-Year Review with the Andover Board of Selectmen. Thank you to Maureen Sundberg for chairing the Read-Along and to so many of you for participating. This is a great community out-reach effort and I found that the readers, both League members and others, were excited about participating.



The Mid-Year Review was also a success with concise and informative presentations providing Andover residents with an update on several ongoing Town projects as well as a review of the Town Charter. Though in-person turnout was low, many people have told me that they took advantage of the opportunity to watch on television or online.

North Andover held a Special Town Meeting on November 17. See Sandy Gleed's article below for more on this.

I hope to see many of you at Andover's Special Town Meeting and at the Holiday Dinner. To those I do not see, Happy Holidays!

North Andover News

By Sandy Gleed, VP North Andover

Dear Members,

Although I didn't get a chance to speak to all of you, I was happy to see many of you present at our recent special town meeting. When only about 1% of our approximately 18,000 registered voters made the effort to show up, it was at least a comfort to know that LWV members were reliable attendees. Moderator Charles Salisbury marched us through approval of all ten articles in record time with little public comment offered from the floor. Although I personally supported passing all ten articles, I do wish that there had been more discussion of the impact of taking an additional \$160,000 out of the discretionary part of the operating fund and moving it over to the fixed-cost debt service budget category. It would have primed voter understanding of the municipal service tradeoffs we're making as we head into the FY2012 budget season...

Speaking of public comment, we'll be hearing much more about the new changes to the public meeting law as each community in the Commonwealth continues to implement changes. One aspect that did not change was the requirement for public bodies to provide an

opportunity for public comment during public meetings. The law still vests control over how and when that provision is to be implemented in the hands of the official running each meeting. I would assume that the provision was originally written in this way because the point of public meetings is to get the public's business done in an efficient and timely manner. Citizens do have several opportunities to publicly voice comment: by speaking directly to elected and appointed officials, town employees and local citizens; by requesting specific agenda items; by speaking during the public comment session in public meetings; by writing letters to local media resources; by self-producing cable programming; by launching websites; and by running for office themselves or by voting for leaders who support their views.

As for the portions of the public meeting law that did change, rather than talk about the specific changes themselves, I'll offer my own perspective on what I've noticed in the past few years: as advocates push for more transparency in public meetings and public records, it becomes more difficult for municipal employees and public officials to comply with the regulations and still get the peoples' business done. I worry that information available to the public has actually become more restrained rather than more transparent. And in a weird way, sunshine laws have sometimes unintentionally seemed to exacerbate distrust in government rather than diminish it. There's a confrontational aspect of their enforcement that disturbs me. When public debate and documentation is viewed as a burden, there's unfortunately a natural tendency to just reduce the debate and documentation. There's only so much that volunteer officials and work-weary town employees can do...I do, however, celebrate the tighter rein on email communications for public officials. Other than the distribution of documents officials need to peruse and prepare in advance of public meetings, a publicly elected or appointed official who is subject to the open meeting law has no business conducting discussion with fellow officials outside the public meeting itself. Of course telephone abuse of the law is still left up to the honor system...therefore it really does come down to electing officials one believes are honorable enough to comply with these restrictions, right?! And enforcement issues would never need to be confrontational if we could work on resolving trust issues, perhaps again resolved by informed voters electing representatives they trust to do the right thing. Notice I said "informed" voters - you'll never know if the right actions are taken if you are not familiar with the issues and options to begin with...

Judging by the recent comments by both citizens and public officials in the North Andover Citizen as well as on the floor of special town meeting, it looks like it would be worth re-visiting this topic, perhaps after Annual Town Meeting, to see whether voters feel the public meeting laws served them well this year. I'm all ears if any LWV members would like to provide me with feedback as we move forward. In the meantime, here's to a very happy and healthy 2011!

Special Town Mtg: Warrant Article Details

For your convenience here is a link to the Warrant Article for the Dec 6th Special Town Meeting.

<http://andoverma.gov/news/images/STMWarrant12-6-10.pdf>

Member Profile: Rusty Dunbar

By Ann Cobleigh



This month, we celebrate another long-time League member, Rusty Dunbar. Rusty's League involvement began in the early 1960's and isn't done yet as she is

presently a member of our 90th Anniversary History Committee.

Rusty grew up in Cambridge, MA and is a second-generation League member as her mother and her mother-in-law were also members. At age 16, she attended Wells College in New York state studying the field of Economics. She then participated in a research project for the Federal Reserve Bank to determine what industries were failing and what would work to rejuvenate them. Rusty worked in the private sector for such companies as Western Electric and Bell Labs. A job she later enjoyed was grading papers at the Harvard Business School.

When Rusty married in the mid-1950's, she and her husband, Doug, moved to Andover where he served as school dentist to Phillips Academy. While raising her family, Rusty joined the League becoming hooked on politics and local government. She was League president from 1963-65 and later served as chairman of the Finance Committee. She is a self-proclaimed "numbers person" and "political junkie," and respects the role the League plays recalling how it was instrumental in Andover's establishing the town manager form of government. Rusty points out that the town relies on talented people and I must say that she is certainly one of them!

Holiday Dinner - December 8th 6:00 PM at the Log Cabin, Phillips Academy

It's not too late! Come eat, drink, socialize, talk politics & issues!

Please RSVP to Heather
Holman at heather@heatherholman.com

Three Current Real Estate Issues & Legislation

By Ann Cobleigh

Editor's Note: The information below is excerpted from the public section of the website of the local association of REALTORS® www.northeastrealtors.com list of the association's current advocacy items as of 11/30/2010. The content has not been edited for inclusion here and is for informational purposes only to provide you with a view into a few of the issues before our state legislators. The League has not taken a position on any of the below items.

Abandoned Property Registry/Copper Pipe Theft Prevention: H.2218

Sponsors - Rep. Barry Finegold

The Community Leadership, Neighborhood-Revitalization and Urban-Violence Protection Act of 2009

Vacant houses are an increasing concern in many communities of the Commonwealth. Many fall into disrepair, attract crime, and create safety issues in neighborhoods down with them. Further, metal piping and other fixtures are stolen from the structure, thus making its title unmarketable for mortgage loan qualification purposes. And the problem is becoming widespread, hurting home values in neighborhoods in which thefts occur. H.2218 seeks to halt and reverse this problem with a 2-prong approach:

1. State Abandoned Housing Registry

The primary difficulty in ensuring that vacant properties are kept in decent condition lies in the difficulty in locating their owners, who are responsible for keeping their property up to Code and preventing it from becoming a public nuisance.

In response to the growing foreclosure/vacancy problem, some cities have enacted local ordinances requiring the registration of vacant properties. However, there is no state law with a single, unified Registry.

H.2218 creates a 2-year pilot program establishing a state-wide vacant and foreclosed property registry housed within the Attorney General's Office that will require all property owners, including lenders, trustees and service companies, to register and properly maintain vacant and foreclosed properties.

2. Licensing Scrap/Junk Dealers

Vacant houses are easy prey for copper thieves. When the piping ... including gas lines... is ripped out of a house, it loses significant value, and banks are unable to grant conventional mortgage loans for such a property. What makes the copper theft problem

difficult to cure is the fact that the thieves rapidly liquidate their booty through scrap/junk dealers who, under the current statutory framework, are not required to keep such records as would help law enforcement to shut down this criminal enterprise.

H.2218 seeks to create a state-wide "Second Hand Metal Registry." This registry will assist in revitalizing our neighborhoods by providing law enforcement with sufficiently detailed transaction information to keep scrap metal thieves out of business and out of houses, helping to ensure that vacant properties will be sold and re-occupied sooner than later.

Status: Before the Joint Committee on Public Safety & Homeland Security.

* * *

SCOPE: H.3474, S.768

Sponsors, Sen. Jen Flanagan, Rep. Stephen DiNatale

**An Act Relative to the Disposal of Municipally Owned Vacant Property or "SCOPE",
Selling City Owned Property Efficiently**

This bill would give municipalities the option of selling municipally owned vacant and underutilized properties on the open market and get them into the hands buyers through a simplified and cost effective process.

In many cases these vacant and abandoned units detract from the quality of neighborhood life and, instead of generating property tax revenues, these properties create a drain on community resources and services.

This proposal for an alternative approach will provide municipalities with the ability to choose a market driven sales program using locally knowledgeable real estate brokers while at the same time, provide a clear and predictable path for the municipal seller, the broker, and the buyer.

By providing municipalities with this option, they will be able to access the network of independent private sector real estate brokers and agents to supply the marketing and brokerage services that most buyers and sellers have come to depend upon to help address their housing and real estate needs.

Status: Before the Joint Committee on Municipalities & Regional Government.

* * *

Housing Production: H.1227

Sponsor - Bradley Jones, Jr.

**An Act to Authorize Limited Rate of Growth Controls
and To Promote Housing Production**

This bill seeks to prohibit city/town from restricting rates of development or issuance of building/special permits within specified time-frames, absent showing of specific circumstances and concerns to which such growth rate restriction constitutes a reasonable response.

A city or town must supplement special restriction with strategic plan to resolve relevant concern(s) that supported the restriction.

Special growth restrictions terminate after 1 yr, but can be extended by local legislative body w/ report and recommendation of Planning Board.

Status: Before the Joint Committee on Housing.

Welcome to Our New Members

We welcome new League members Steve and Fran Fink of Andover! Many of you know Steve as an active member of the Andover community and a co-founder of Sustainable Andover. We look forward to having Steve and Fran as a part of the League.

Fall/Early Winter Calendar

For the most up to date calendar information visit [our website](#)

December

- 6 Mon Andover Special Town Meeting
- 8 Wed Holiday Dinner, 90th Anniversary Event & Board Meeting, 6:00 p.m., at the Log Cabin, Phillips Academy (bird sanctuary)
- 10 Fri January Bulletin Article Submissions Deadline
- 14 Mon Lunch & Conversation, 11:30 a.m., Panera, Rtes 114 & 133, North Andover

January

- 12 Wed Board Meeting, 7:00 p.m.
- 14 Fri Lunch & Conversation, 11:30 a.m., Panera, Rtes 114 & 133, North Andover
- 20 Thu February Bulletin Article Submissions Deadline
- 25 Tue Andover Special Election
- TBD Running for Office Workshop
- TBD LWVMA Program Planning

February

- 9 Wed Board Meeting
- 14 Tue Lunch & Conversation, 11:30 a.m., Panera, Rtes 114 & 133, North Andover
- 18 Fri March Bulletin Article Submissions Deadline

Available Board Positions

If you'd like to have a greater impact on democracy in our communities, consider joining the League Board of Directors. The following positions are accepting applications/nominations for the current fiscal year:

Position	Primary Responsibilities
Secretary	Keep board and annual meeting minutes

Membership Chair	Keep membership data, organize membership materials, coordinate new member recruitment
Nominating Chair	Coordinate nominating slate for officers and directors
Legislative Action Chair	Distribute Action Alerts, write monthly column for the <i>Bulletin</i>
Cable TV - Andover	Coordinate local cable coverage of events
Andover School Committee Observer	Observe school committee meetings and write a summary monthly column for the <i>Bulletin</i>

About the League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters is a 90-year old national nonpartisan organization that encourages the informed and active participation of individuals in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League neither supports nor opposes candidates for office, elected officials or political parties at any level of government.

The Andover/North Andover League focuses on topics directly impacting the citizens of our communities.

Membership in the League is open to all women and men.

Membership Form

--Sign up online at www.lwv-andovers.org or complete and mail the below form. The League's membership year is July-June.

_____ New _____ Renewal

_____ \$55 Basic Member

_____ \$60 Contributing Member

_____ \$75 Sustaining Member

_____ \$100+ Patron

_____ \$35 Senior Citizen (65 yrs. old and over)

_____ \$35 Student (under 24 yrs. old)

_____ \$75 Household Dues (2+ persons in same household)

_____ In addition to my membership fee, I'd like to make a contribution of \$_____.

_____ Enclosed is a separate check containing my tax-deductible contribution of \$_____ payable to the Education Fund, which supports the LWV's educational activities.

Please make checks payable to:
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