

ABOUT THE LEAGUE

PURPOSE

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization which encourages informed and active participation in government. As an organization it may take action on governmental measures and policies on which members have reached consensus and have formulated a position. The League of Women Voters of Westport is affiliated with the League of Women Voters of Connecticut and the League of Women Voters of the United States.

PRINCIPLES

The League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.

The League of Women Voters believes that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education which provides equal opportunities for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.

The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people: that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.

The League of Women Voters believes that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems, and that the development of international organizations and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

The League of Women Voters believes that all powers of the U.S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: executive, legislative and judicial.

NONPARTISAN POLICY

Revisions approved by Board November 3, 2011

The bylaws of the League of Women Voters state that the League "shall not support or oppose any political party or candidate." This policy is essential to the strength, plausibility and effectiveness of the League in the community, the state and the nation. In order to uphold this responsibility, the League of Women Voters of Westport expects its Board members to adhere to the following guidelines to protect our nonpartisanship.

1. **Public Office.** A Board member may not run for, or hold, any partisan public office. A Board member may run for or hold a local non partisan elective office. In addition, a Board member may accept appointment to a local, state or national non partisan commission, board, committee, or task force after notifying the Board of such prospective service. In the event that the Board member will be serving as a representative of the Westport League in such appointive position, then the approval of the Board will be required.

2. **Political Party Office.** A Board member may not serve on the town committee of a political party. None of the Co-Presidents or Co-Vice Presidents for Voter Services may serve on the board of any organization affiliated with a political party.

3. **Political Campaigns.** The Westport League views participation in local caucuses, donations of political

contributions and signing of petitions as an extension of the right to vote. However, Board members may not serve as a campaign manager or fundraising chair for any candidate for partisan elective office. In other campaign-related activities, such as appearances at fundraisers and campaign events, Board members should exercise discretion.

4. **Social Media.** A Board member should exercise discretion in using social media in connection with any political campaign, including but not limited to blogs and social networking sites, so as not to jeopardize the credibility of the League as a nonpartisan organization or impair the League's effectiveness in the community.

5. **Family members.** The political activities of a spouse or relative of a Board member should be considered separate and distinct from the activities of the Board member. However, the public prominence of the Board member and the sensitivity of her or his position on the Board should be taken into account when employing this policy.

6. **Resignation.** A Board member should resign as soon as the Board has reached a decision that the circumstances make it unsuitable for her or him to serve on the Board.

7. **Clarification.** There shall be consultation with the Board if any question arises under this policy. A majority of the Board shall resolve the question.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are \$60. for an individual, \$85 for a supporting member, and \$90. for two members of a family, supporting family membership is \$115.. Our membership year is July 1 through June 30. Nonpayment of dues will result in cancellation of membership. Dues and contributions are not tax deductible, with the exception of donations to the League of Women Voters Education Fund.

YOUR PLACE IN THE LEAGUE

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Informing the community about the League's activities strengthens the League's ability to be effective and increases membership. Thus, Community Services covers projects and programs that involve outreach to the larger community: public

relations, *Know Your Town: A Directory of Officials, Agencies and Services*, an annual Staples Tuition Grant, the Memorial Day Parade, our website and our two school programs: 7th Grade Voter Education and High School Civics .

The League has supported the Staples High School Tuition Grant Program since 1990. The LWV Westport scholarship is awarded to a female Staples graduate (chosen by the Tuition Grant committee) who has shown civic responsibility or plans to major in political science, social studies, or history in college. Contact Suzanne Adams, 226-9716, or Suzanne.adams8@gmail.com if you are interested in participating in any of these activities.

MEMBER SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION

Member Services publishes the monthly *Westport Voter* and the annual *Member Handbook* and maintains the email list and telephone tree and administers the membership database required by the State and National Leagues. Contact Jackie Gordon, 803-7325, or jevag@aol.com. if you are interested in helping with any of these activities.

EVENTS

A variety of social events are held throughout the year including the Fall Brunch, Post-Election Coffee, Holiday Party, and Annual Meeting. These events rely on members to cook, bake, set-up and clean-up. Contact Becky Ruthven 222-1206, or bruthven@optonline.net if you are willing to help with these short term volunteer opportunities.

PROGRAM/ADVOCACY

PROGRAM

Program can be at the local, state or national level. At the local level, members choose issues for study at the annual program planning meeting. Studies include research and discussion, and culminate in consensus and the development of a position that is adopted by approval of the Board and the general membership.

OBSERVER CORPS/ACTION COMMITTEE

Members of the Observer Corps are the eyes and ears of the League at public meetings; they attend town board and commission meetings to listen and take notes on the agenda items. They do not speak, testify or act in any way on issues under discussion. Observers meet monthly, together with the Action Committee, to share observations and jointly identify issues meriting League attention. The Action Committee follows these issues as they develop and based on League positions, recommends action in a variety of forms, including meetings with elected or appointed officials, statements at public meetings, letters, or articles for the local papers.

VOTER SERVICES

Voter Services strives to increase citizen participation in the electoral process and to increase political awareness in a nonpartisan manner. Each year, the League creates a Voters' Guide that contains information on candidates and issues for the upcoming elections.

During the fall, debates are held to help citizens learn candidates' positions on the issues. Questions from the audience highlight voter concerns and issues. Debates are usually broadcast on the local government access cable channel.

Voter Services assists the Westport registrars with registering eligible high school students and educating the public on voting changes such as the new optical scanning voting machines. Voter Services is continually developing "Get out the Vote" campaigns and exploring new ways to increase voter turnout. Contact Karen Curtis 203-259-1880, ctkcurtis@aol.com, if you are interested in participating in any of the Voter Services activities.

PROGRAM AND ADVOCACY 2016-2017

Local Program: Local Program planning approved (1) The Senior Housing and Baron's South Committee will continue following the on-going discussions about creating affordable senior housing on the Baron's South property and advocating for their development.(2) A mini study to explore Creative Housing Alternatives for those who would like to downsize and continue to live in Westport. This study will examine several options and the zoning issues that facilitate or impede their development.

Local Advocacy: The LWV Westport website www.lwvwestportct.org and the Westport Voter provide information about current local advocacy issues that the League is following and calls to member action as needed.

State and National Program and Advocacy: LWVCT and LWVUS continue to be involved in dynamic Program and Advocacy initiatives. Their websites allow members to keep abreast of their work and facilitate member involvement in advocacy at all levels of government. Consider signing up to be a *10 Minute Advocate* for issues that interest you on the LWVCT website. *10 Minute Advocate* is the last option in the Advocacy menu.

www.lwv.org www.lwvct.org

LOCAL POSITIONS

Copies of complete positions are available on our website at www.westport.lwvct.org or by calling the League President.

LAND USE AND MANAGEMENT

COASTAL AND INLAND WETLANDS

(Adopted 1997, Revised 1998, 2012)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports the Town's current policy to preserve inland and tidal wetlands as resources. As stated in the 2007 Town Plan of Conservation and Development, "Some resources are so important to environmental quality or community character that alterations to these areas should continue to be avoided to the extent feasible and the land preserved in its natural state." In addition, the League supports strong regulation and review of development activities affecting Westport's wetlands.

PUBLIC LAND: MANAGEMENT, ACQUISITION, USE AND DISPOSAL

(Adopted 1966, Revised 1983, 1985, 1989, 1992, 1995, 2001, 2012)

To maintain the character and beauty of our town and its natural resources, to contain and shape commercial growth, and to control traffic and town development, the League of Women Voters of Westport supports a strong program for municipal acquisition and preservation of open space. We urge the Town of Westport to acquire and retain through whatever means are available to it, specific parcels of undeveloped land that meet criteria adopted by LWV Westport, the 1997 Town Plan of Conservation and Development (the Town Plan), and the Land Acquisition Committee Report, 2000 (LAC).

PLANNING AND ZONING HOUSING

(Adopted 1983, Revised 1992, 2012)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports planning and zoning regulations that would provide a broad mix of housing options, including affordable housing, to meet the needs of various income and age groups. All housing regulations should conform to the LWV Westport criteria for good planning, zoning and water use.

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS

(Adopted 1965, Revised 1983, 1992, 2006, 2012)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports the strengthening of present procedures for the planning, construction and/or conversion of municipal buildings to achieve improved overall coordination among all town boards and agencies responsible for decisions at any stage of a building project.

PLANNING AND ZONING

(Adopted 1969, Revised 1970, 1983, 2001, 2012)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports municipal planning and adoption and implementation of zoning regulations based on the current Westport Plan of Conservation & Development (the Town Plan). The Town's planning and zoning regulation and enforcement should preserve the residential character of Westport, regulate commercial development, minimize traffic congestion, and protect the open space essential to Westport's quality of life.

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ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

(Adopted 1967, 2012)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports a policy of strict interpretation of the powers granted to the Zoning Board of Appeals, so that the ZBA shall be in harmony with the general intent of Westport's zoning regulations. Variances should be granted only when valid hardship concerning

the use of the specific piece of land and/or property is proven. According to State Statute, financial loss does not constitute a valid hardship.

ZONING ENFORCEMENT

(Adopted 1967)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports a forceful, thorough and adequately funded zoning enforcement policy that provides an adequate method to seek out zoning violations. The policy should also employ all legal tools necessary to correct these violations as swiftly as possible.

TOWN GOVERNMENT AND SERVICES

BOARD OF FINANCE

(Adopted 1978, Revised 1979, 1983, 1992)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports the separation of power, as established by Town Charter, among the First Selectman, the Board of Finance and the Representative Town Meeting, in budget preparation and review and approval of appropriations.

BUDGET PROCESS

(Adopted 2007)

The LWV believes that Westport's budget process should produce budgets, both Town and Education, that meet the needs of the town as a whole. The budget process should:

- be transparent
- afford opportunity for resident participation
- reflect long-term planning
- result in the adoption of a budget in a timely fashion.

EDUCATION

(Adopted 1970, Revised 1973, 1976, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1992, 2006)

Board of Education

The League of Women Voters of Westport believes that a Board of Education elected on a nonpartisan basis would be the most effective organization for the Westport community. The League supports a Board of Education that:

1. reflects diverse segments of the community;
2. supports efforts to modernize and clarify the budget*;
3. initiates a process for evaluation of program, personnel and facilities.

Education Philosophy

LWV Westport believes our curriculum should prepare all young people for the future. We recommend a broad-based, integrated curriculum that teaches critical and analytical thinking built upon communication skills, as well as on literature, the arts, mathematics, science, technology, history, civics and the global world. It is important to remember that each individual learns at his or her own pace and in his or her own style. Therefore, it is recommended that the approaches to learning and to teaching remain sufficiently flexible to accommodate such individual differences.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

(Adopted 2003, Revised 2006)

To meet the changing needs of Westport residents and to build a greater sense of community in all segments of Westport's population, the League of Women Voters of Westport supports a strong Health District and a strong network of human services. We support increased daycare, recreation and counseling services for children, and expanded affordable housing and transportation. We

recommend that the Town adequately fund the Health and Human Services Department and hire a grants writer.

PARKS AND RECREATION

(Adopted 1973, Revised 1985, 1989, 1995, 2001)

The League of Women Voters of Westport recommends that the Town of Westport, through its appropriate agencies, be responsive to the active and passive recreational needs of the residents, and that the Town's recreational facilities and parks be well maintained..

The town should develop a philosophy for parks which would include a vision of parkland conducive to the highest and best use of leisure for all town residents in parks, programs and facilities .LWV supports a broad-based recreational program for all segments of the Community--one that meets its changing needs. The Recreation Commission should establish criteria for present and future programs based on the facilities that are available or needed, the cost, the impact on the environment, and the. Impact on neighborhoods. There should be continual maintenance of recreational facilities with special emphasis on safety. The Town should maintain the existing percentages of approximately 85% user fees and 15% town taxes. Major adult programs should be self-supporting, and youth programs subsidized. Financial assistance should be available to both youth and adults who are in need. A brochure, listing facilities and programs, should be available to every resident.

TOWN DEPARTMENT FUNDING

(Adopted 2000)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports funding town departments other than the Department of Parks and Recreation primarily through taxes. Charging reasonable fees for services is an acceptable way to supplement/augment town revenue, but should not become a significant funding mechanism.

TRANSPORTATION

(Adopted 2000)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports improved traffic flow and safety, and reduced congestion on local and state roads, but opposes widening the Post Road and adding lanes to major state highways. We support traffic planning and engineering solutions for local roads and enhancement of mass transit both locally and regionally.

The League recommends measures to alleviate parking pressure downtown such as the use of satellite parking lots and shuttles from the perimeter of town as well as from neighboring towns.

WASTE DISPOSAL HOUSEHOLD SOLID WASTE

(Adopted 1971, Revised 1978, 1983, 1995)

The League of Women Voters of Westport supports a regional long-term solid waste disposal program that will give special consideration to the quality of our environment and the recovering of our resources. We support continuing efforts toward waste reduction by an expanded recycling program.

LEAF MANAGEMENT

(Adopted 1995)

We believe the Town has a responsibility to provide a place on town property to which residents can take their leaves and brush. We assume the Town will be responsible for the proper use of such areas. The most environmentally sound, efficient and economical way to recycle Westport's leaves is residential backyard leaf management.