

THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY VOTER

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of the Champlain Valley

October 2007

CVLWV Board, 2007 - 2008

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Calendar of Events

We sponsor meetings and events for the public and League members.

Champlain Valley LWV Monthly Meetings

Date	Time	Place	Description
Friday, October 12	10 am	Brownell Library, Essex Junction	CVLWV Board of Directors Monthly Meeting. As always, all are welcome to attend.
Thursday, October 18	7:45 – 9:00 pm	Vermont Public Television Studio Fort Ethan Allen 204 Ethan Allen Ave. Colchester, VT	How Should Vermont Raise and Spend its Transportation Dollars? All Vermont League Members are invited to be the audience for Public Square , Vermont Public Television's live, issue-focused show. The topic is Transportation. Please arrive by 7:45 pm so that we're seated before the show begins.
Nov. 10	2 pm	Rooms 305-306 Robert & Holly Miller Info Center (Library) Champlain College	Attracting and Empowering Women in Public Life. Speaker of the House Gaye Symington (D) and Senator Diane Snelling (R) speak at this program, which we are pleased to be co-sponsoring w/ the American Assoc. of University Women (AAUW).
Nov. 14	Noon – 1 pm	Pickering Room at Fletcher Free Library 235 College Street Burlington	Immigration Policy. Join your fellow League members to discuss and vote on consensus questions from National LWV on the topic of immigration. The process of study and coming to consensus is a time-honored League process by which we arrive at a position – soundly based on members' views – on issues of importance to our democracy. This is your chance to participate in one of the liveliest, most well-informed discussions there is! For more info, see the Immigration Study Consensus Kit at www.lwv.org .

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT - Marge Gaskins

Our programs for this year have started off well. On affordable housing, Keri Toksu did a great job organizing both a noon meeting and an evening meeting with a brilliant panel. (Please see summaries in separate articles below.) Having two meetings gives everyone, whether they prefer day or night meetings, the opportunity to participate. And there certainly was enough information for both programs. Of course, we always miss members who cannot attend, and we look forward to seeing them at a future meeting.

This month's program at Vermont Public Television (VPT) on Transportation is not to be missed.

The League will comprise the entire audience, so please be sure to attend. Vermont is the perfect place to raise this issue. We touched on some of this in our recent energy study, and I recall when we in League struggled with this issue and suggested bike paths, car pools, and commuter buses and trains. I believe this came about when we did our national energy study and consensus. It will be interesting to hear what the participants at VPT have to say.

I do hope you are all looking at the League information on the study of Immigration and getting your thoughts and opinions ready for consensus. I am sure it will be an important issue in next year's elections. Of course we have a stake in this with Canada so nearby. We may tend to think we don't need to worry with such a friendly relationship, but then I remember that our biggest "drug bust" came through Canada. That discussion could take place as early as November.

If any of you have any questions about our programs or meeting times, be sure and let us know.

Annual Dues are Due!

Would you please remit annual membership dues (now \$50) to:

Champlain Valley League of Women Voters
PO Box 8266
Essex, VT 05451

Thank you for helping to keep us on a sound financial footing!

GREEN MOUNTAIN HABITAT DIRECTOR SPEAKS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Keri Toksu

On September 5th, we held the first of two meetings on the issue of affordable housing. Our speaker was David Mullin, Executive Director of Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity.

David began the meeting with a short film depicting the work Habitat has done to create decent housing for those who live in deplorable conditions throughout the world. He then discussed the

work of Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity, which has been in operation in Vermont for 26 years and is Vermont's fifth-largest non-profit homebuilder.

He explained that Green Mountain Habitat works in partnership with low-income families, who are required to work a minimum of 200 hours on the building of their new home. Each home is built using approximately 400 volunteers and donated materials whenever possible, and homeowners are offered 0% interest, 25-year loans to pay off their mortgages. David went on to explain that the biggest difficulties Habitat faces from a policy perspective are zoning laws, which require an enormous amount of time, and therefore money, to navigate and limit the number of units that can be built within a geographic area.

Senator Jim Condos (D, Chittenden) also attended the meeting and described his experience as a legislator working on the Farrell Street project in South Burlington. This project faced similar problems to those faced by many Habitat projects: zoning and NIMBY ("not in my back yard"). However, through cooperation with the community and due to a strong legislative will, the project was completed and is now a good example of affordable housing in South Burlington.

Thank you to both David Mullen and Jim Condos for describing the efforts being made to create affordable housing in Vermont and some of the issues that must be addressed by our legislature.

PANEL DISCUSSES WHY AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS IMPORTANT TO US ALL

Our second meeting on the issue of affordable housing, held on September 19th, featured a panel discussion with **John Fairbanks** of [Vermont Housing Finance Agency](#) - a bank that helps qualified people buy their first home, helps fund construction of affordable housing, and educates the public on housing issues; **Brenda Torpy** of [Champlain Housing Trust](#) - a community land trust, serving Chittenden, Franklin & Grand Isle counties, that works to keep housing (rented and owned) affordable; and **Rep. Helen Head**, So. Burlington, who chairs the [House General, Housing and Military Affairs Committee](#), which is the starting point for housing-related legislation.

Here are some thoughts expressed and impressions gleaned that evening :

- Affordable housing is important to all of us because inadequate housing affects all of us, not just those who can't afford it.
- What is affordable? No more than 30% of income. Many people pay 30-40% for their residence. The median household income in VT is \$48,000, which should afford a house worth about \$140,000. Yet, median house prices in many areas are much higher than that. In the last 10 years, the median house price has doubled, making it harder for more people to find a home they can afford.
- VT has the tightest housing market in the country.
- 60% of VT households have one wage earner. Largest job categories are retail clerk and cashier. 40% of workforce is in low-skill, low-wage jobs. These jobs are essential to our society; yet, they often don't pay livable wages.
- For moderate and low income people, there are no more safety nets.
- Rising health care costs are the primary cause of homelessness in VT.

- VHFA is trying to get businesses involved in housing issues.
- Employer-assisted housing is a benefit that can be given to employees.
- Some businesses are beginning to realize that housing for their employees is their problem, and not someone else's problem. Upper Valley Housing Coalition (in the White River Jct. area) is a group of businesses doing studies, surveys, needs assessments, talking about creating a land bank for affordable housing. More of this needed.
- Affordability is a key component in state housing policy.
- Rep. Head's committee will meet jointly with House National Resources committee to hear report from the summer committee on housing.
- Current public policy is leading to a point where VT will become a gated senior living community!

BRING YOUR TRANSPORTATION QUESTIONS TO VPT! - Keri Toksu

All Vermont League Members are invited to participate as the audience for the October 18th "Public Square" (www.vpt.org/programs/publicsquare.html), a live, issue-focused program airing on Vermont Public Television. The October edition will address the issue of transportation through a panel discussion with three experts - Vermont Secretary of Transportation, Neale Lunderville; the director of the Snelling Center, Charlie Smith; and someone (TBD) from the UVM Transportation Center - followed by audience Q&A.

Usually, the program takes questions by telephone from throughout Vermont. This month, all questions will be asked by our League audience. Please be sure to attend this opportunity for the League to be featured on statewide television. Come and learn more about this topic of interest to the League and all Vermonters. And ask your questions! (See Calendar, page 1, for time/place.)

SAVE A TREE! Due to the cost of postage and labor, we encourage members to obtain this newsletter electronically. Please let our editor know if you can make the switch from paper to (colorful) pixels. Reach her at imwren@aol.com. Thank you!

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Membership in the League is open to men and women citizens of all ages. With more than 86 years of experience and 850 local and state affiliates, the League is one of America's most trusted grassroots organizations.