



July 8, 2025

Councilor Lisle Baker
Chair, Zoning & Planning Committee
Newton City Council
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Councilor Baker,

The League of Women Voters of Newton (LWVN) is writing to express our disappointment with your decision to exclude representatives of the business community from the Zoning and Planning Committee's "discussion" tomorrow (July 9) at 7:00pm, in which the committee will be looking at the challenges facing the office market and developing strategies to recruit new commercial office tenants to Newton.

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) believes that "*democratic government depends upon informed and **active participation** at all levels of government.*"¹ LWVUS further supports and works towards achieving "*broader public participation in government as a necessary component of decision-making at all levels of government.*"²

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has a goal of promoting an "*open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive and that assures opportunities for citizen participation in government decision-making.*"³

For years, LWVN has been advocating for transparency in local government (see our [Municipal Transparency & Accountability Report](#)). While our Transparency Report does not directly address the requirements for public participation in committee hearings, LWVN believes that allowing community members to address the City Council, and make their concerns about local issues heard, is the heart of transparency.

We agree with Greg Reibman's, the President and CEO of the Charles River Regional Chamber, assertion that, "Submitting written comments is no substitute for engaging in dialogue with the committee. Nor does it provide an opportunity to respond to councilors' questions and/or

¹ LWVUS *Impact on Issues*: Statement of Position on the Citizen's Right to Know/Citizen Participation, as announced by the national board, June 1984.

² LWVUS *Impact on Issues*, Page 59

³ LWVMA *Where We Stand*, page 1

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

comments, or to suggestions the Planning Department may offer, which we may or may not agree with.”⁴

If this is truly a “discussion” of issues of concern to the business community and they are highly knowledgeable about the falling demand for office space, why not allow the business community input into that discussion from the beginning where they have the opportunity to help influence the best solutions?

With all due respect,

Frieda Dweck & Jane Harper

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Co-Presidents, League of Women Voters of Newton

cc: City Council

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

Greg Reibman, President & CEO of Charles River Regional Chamber

Fig City News

Newton Beacon

⁴ July 8 Charles River Regional Chamber newsletter