

A GUIDE TO RUNNING FOR LOCAL OFFICE IN WESTFORD

The League of Women Voters of Westford



**LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®**

Why This Guide Was Written

The Westford LWV feels strongly that all residents are well served when elections for local office are contested. This leads to more debate and a choice for voters. This Guide has been written to help anyone who is interested in running for local office. It gathers information from many available sources, as well as providing suggestions and tips for running for office not found anywhere else. Many League members and town residents have generously shared their time and expertise to provide a complete picture of what needs to be done to run for local office.

This Guide is intended to be used for many years. As such, specific dates and times are not listed. However, the Guide will always reference the appropriate place on the town's website (www.westfordma.gov) where current information can be found.

About The League Of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. It never supports or opposes political parties or candidates. The League takes action on selected matters of governmental concern that its members have studied. Membership in the League is open to both women and men.

The League of Women Voters of Westford

Acknowledgements

The League of Women Voters of Westford interviewed former candidates and researched content for this Guide. The League would like to thank all those who have generously given their time, talents, and input to the making of this Guide: Lynn Cohen, Judy Culver, Laura Dickey, Donna Furman, Ellen Harde, Scott Hazelton, Pam Holland, Jim Jarvie, Andrea Peraner-Sweet, Bob Price, Kelly Ross, Kaari Mai Tari, Leslie Vieth, and Diane Wood.

The following sources were also reviewed:

Concord-Carlisle League of Women Voters, *Getting Elected in Concord, 2012*

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, *Why and How to Run for Elected Office, 2008*

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MAKING THE DECISION TO RUN

Running for office can be a rewarding experience and candidates gain tremendous knowledge about themselves personally as well as professionally.

One of the first steps for successfully running for office is to think through your decision to run. Do you feel a civic responsibility to contribute and make Westford a better place to live? Do you feel that you could perhaps contribute more? Are you tenacious and thick-skinned enough to withstand criticism? Talk to people who are on boards to learn about their experience. Be clear on your motives for running, as you certainly will be asked. If you have been more focused on a single hot-button issue, be aware that if elected, you will be representing the town on many other issues that come before boards and committees, and you should be ready to continually exhibit that same level of passion and dedication.

Running for office involves hard work, time commitment, and good planning. The specific elected office and the number of candidates running will also determine the amount of time required. A contested Board of Selectmen race, for example, will require more effort than an uncontested Library Trustee race. If elected, serving on a board will require time to attend meetings, as well as preparing for them, and also require time to respond to town resident phone calls, emails, and requests.

“Running (and winning) resulted in a great sense of accomplishment.”

Kelly Ross, Selectman, 2013

ELECTED BOARDS

The Westford Town Charter, which was adopted in 1989, established seven elected boards or positions in our town government:

Elected Position	Number of Seats	Term
Board of Health	5	3 years
Housing Authority	5	5 years
Library Trustee	6	3 years
Planning Board	5	5 years
School Committee	7	3 years
Board of Selectmen	5	3 years
Moderator	1	3 years

The Board of Health is responsible for protecting the public health of the town by adopting appropriate local health regulations and by carrying out preventive programs. The Board oversees the activities of the Director of Environmental Services and the Director of Health Care Services, and has responsibility for enforcing the state health, sanitary, and environmental codes. They generally meet on the second Monday of each month in the evening.

The Housing Authority is the local body responsible for the expenditure of state and federal housing grants. The Authority owns and manages a number of housing units for the elderly, low income, and those with special needs. The Authority meets the second Thursday of each month in the evening.

The J.V. Fletcher Library Board of Trustees is empowered by Massachusetts law to establish policy and oversee administration of the town Library. The Trustees hire the Library Director and Assistant Director and work with the director to develop and enforce library policy. They also administer the Library trust funds. The Trustees generally meet in the evening on the first Monday of the month.

The Planning Board establishes planning goals and develops strategies to implement those goals, which take the form of zoning by-laws. In addition, they administer the Subdivision Control Law,

which establishes the process for development of new roads and new housing. They meet the first and third Monday of every month in the evening.

The School Committee works with the Superintendent of Schools to establish educational goals, prepare and approve budgets, and develop policies for the schools. Under Massachusetts General Law, the Committee has the authority to select and terminate the Superintendent. They usually meet twice a month on Monday evenings during the school year.

The Board of Selectmen is the chief policy-making entity of the town and is ultimately responsible for the enforcement of all town bylaws and regulations. The Selectmen hire the Town Manager, appoint Town Counsel, and also appoint voters to certain committees. They have the responsibility of crafting and assembling the articles on the Town Meeting warrants. They normally meet twice each month on the second and fourth Tuesday evening.

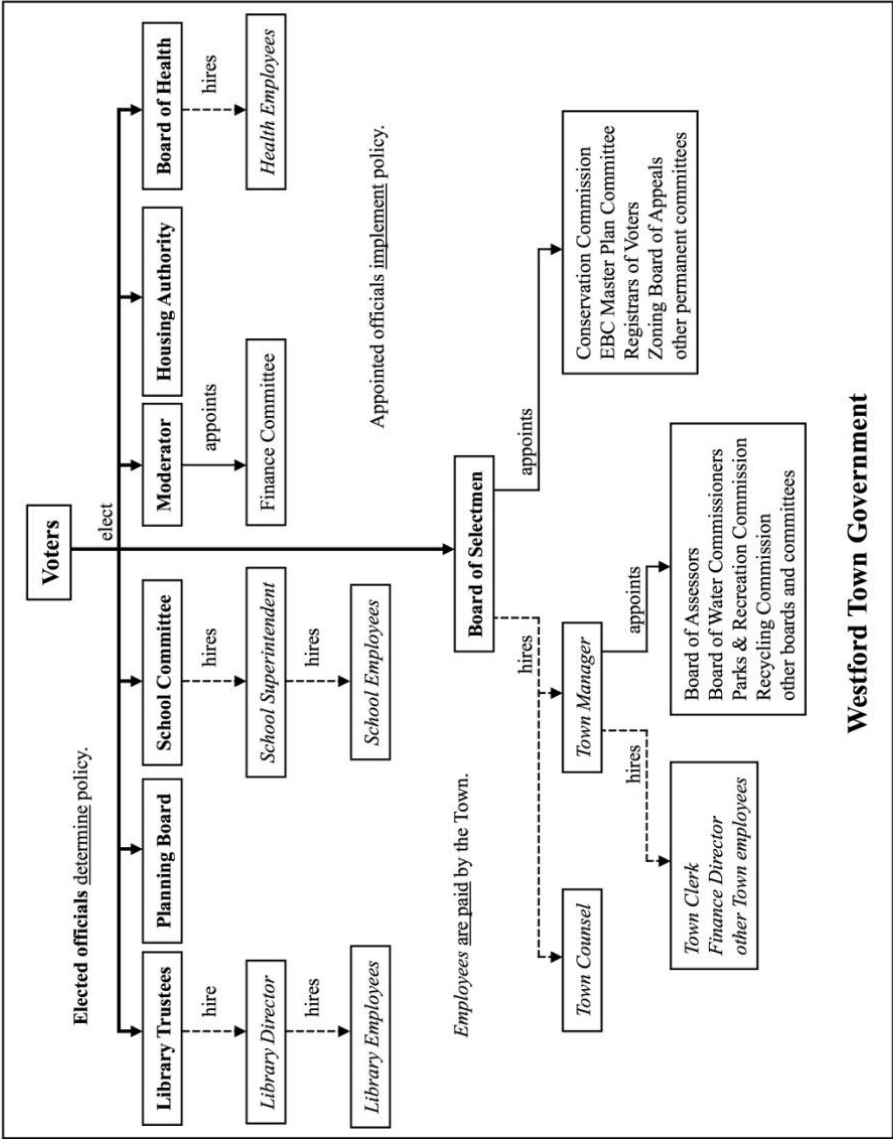
The Moderator is elected to a three-year term to preside at Town Meeting and also appoints the members of the Finance Committee, who advise the voters through recommendations at Town Meeting. The Moderator may advise the Selectmen as well as private citizens submitting warrant petitions, as they prepare articles for Town Meeting warrants and motions for Town Meetings.

Members of elected boards may also serve on subcommittees to work on specific short-term projects for their boards. Some members may serve on behalf of their board as liaisons to committees to facilitate communication. (The Library Board of Trustees, for example, appoints one Trustee to attend the Friends of the J.V. Fletcher Library monthly meetings.) This may increase the amount of meeting and preparation time involved.

If an elected board member resigns prematurely, the Selectmen and the board will jointly appoint an interim member to serve until the next town election, the following May, at which time the position becomes open but only for the remaining years of the original term.

See the town website or refer to the Annual Town Report for more information on these elected boards. The Town Charter describes how the town is to be governed under a board of selectmen/town manager form of administration; it may be viewed online at www.westfordma.gov/documentcenter/view/3029.

The following page contains a diagram showing the relationship between elected officials, appointed officials, and town employees.



Westford Town Government

HOW TO START

Once you have made the decision to run for a specific position, talk to as many people as possible to understand the issues and topics that are important to them. Attend board meetings, talk to committee heads and board chairs to get their perspectives, and share your intention to run. Attending these sessions in person is also another opportunity to gain campaign visibility.

When meeting with committees, it is helpful to express your interest to the committee chair and to the appointing authority, usually the Board of Selectmen or the Town Manager. (Finance Committee members are appointed by the Moderator.) Call members of the board and tell them you are considering a run for the office and ask that they consider supporting you.

Watching committee meetings on WestfordCAT and reading town-posted meeting minutes are additional ways to familiarize yourself with the issues and decisions being made.

Previous committee experience is always a plus, and you may consider first serving as an appointed member of a committee to gain experience and knowledge about the town's operations. Residents interested in volunteering for a committee can use the following link to reach the online citizen activity form: <https://data.westfordma.gov/bc/newcaf.php>.

You can also review the town website to familiarize yourself with posted material on current town budgets, the Comprehensive Master Plan, the Open Meeting Law, and other information that could help you.

When considering what town board to run for, consider the meeting schedule of that board. Boards have a regular schedule (for example, the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m.). Be sure you are able to make these meetings before deciding to run for a position.

According to former candidates, the estimated costs for running for elected office can vary from a negligible amount for less complicated or uncontested races, to a high of \$4000–\$5000 for a contested Selectman’s race, where you may be doing a town-wide mailing.

“Do your homework and attend as many meetings as possible. Prior to running for the Board of Selectmen, I served on the Energy Committee.”

Jim Jarvie, Board of Selectmen candidate, 2013

NOMINATION PAPERS

In order to run for elected office in Westford, you have to get your name on the ballot for the May town election. It is not necessary to have your name on the ballot—one Library Trustee was elected to office as a write-in candidate—but it is highly recommended that you take out and return nomination papers for your intended position. This is accomplished by collecting a minimum of 50 valid signatures of registered Westford voters. The Town Clerk will provide you with three identical sheets for voters to sign. (Make sure you sign all three forms indicating “I Accept the Nomination”!) It takes time to collect signatures, but it is acceptable to have others help you circulate the papers. (Be wary of duplicate signatures, however.) Meetings of town boards and committees are good locations for collecting signatures. Board members and those attending their meetings understand the process and are usually willing to help.

Collecting signatures is an opportunity to meet the voters and to introduce yourself and your positions. Aim to fill all three sheets completely and return them to the Town Clerk before the deadline. Nomination papers are available from the Town Clerk's office on January 1, and must be returned 49 days before the election. Exact dates are published in a Candidates' Timeline on the town's website in February.

When you are at the Town Clerk's office, consider picking up a CD containing the town's full voter list. Normally such a CD would cost \$20, but each candidate is entitled to one free copy. The CD can also include any past election voter activity.

You may bypass the above nomination process by running a write-in or sticker campaign. Your name doesn't have to appear on the ballot—your supporters can write your name in. To make the task even easier for your supporters, you may consider printing up stickers with your name and address and handing them out before the election or at the polls.

A specimen ballot is shown on the following page. The spaces for a write-in candidate are listed below all registered candidates.

**SAMPLE BALLOT ANNUAL
TOWN ELECTION TOWN
OF WESTFORD TUESDAY, *Two-Sided Ballot
MAY 2, 2017 *Two-Sided Ballot**

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTER:

A. To vote, fill in the OVAL to the right of your choice like this:

B. Follow the directions as to the number of candidates to be marked for each office.

C. To vote for a person whose name is not printed on the ballot, write the candidate's name in the blank provided and fill in the oval.

SELECTMAN
FOR THREE YEARS Vote for TWO

ELIZABETH M. ALMEIDA 41 West Street

G. THOMAS CLAY 7 Ward Hill Road

DENNIS J. GALVIN 90 Concord Road

DO NOT VOTE IN THIS SPACE.
USE BLANK LINE BELOW FOR WRITE-IN.

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

BOARD OF HEALTH
FOR THREE YEARS Vote for TWO

ZAC A. CATALDO 121 Depot Street

MICHELE PITONIAK-CRAWFORD 15 Shelly Lane

DO NOT VOTE IN THIS SPACE.
USE BLANK LINE BELOW FOR WRITE-IN.

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

BOARD OF HEALTH
ONE YEAR VACANCY Vote for ONE

JOANNE E. BELANGER 6 Maria Ann Drive

SHUNHE XIONG 13 Villanova Drive

DO NOT VOTE IN THIS SPACE.
USE BLANK LINE BELOW FOR WRITE-IN.

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

HOUSING AUTHORITY
FOR FIVE YEARS Vote for ONE

DIANE L. HOLMES 13 Sandstone Road

DO NOT VOTE IN THIS SPACE.
USE BLANK LINE BELOW FOR WRITE-IN.

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

LIBRARY TRUSTEE
FOR THREE YEARS Vote for TWO

HAIJO W. KOESTER 85 Providence Road

ROBERT D. PRICE 18 Stratton Hill Road

DO NOT VOTE IN THIS SPACE.
USE BLANK LINE BELOW FOR WRITE-IN.

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

MODERATOR
FOR THREE YEARS Vote for ONE

THOMAS J. SEVERO 19 Villanova Drive

DONALD L. SIRIANI 49 Grantham Road

SUSAN MCNEILL SPUHLER 232 Concord Road

DO NOT VOTE IN THIS SPACE.
USE BLANK LINE BELOW FOR WRITE-IN.

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

PLANNING BOARD
FOR FIVE YEARS Vote for ONE

DYLAN K. O'CONNOR 3 Lambert Way

DO NOT VOTE IN THIS SPACE.
USE BLANK LINE BELOW FOR WRITE-IN.

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

PLANNING BOARD
THREE YEAR VACANCY Vote for ONE

GARY W. LAVELLE 2 Meadow View Lane

THOMAS F. SPUHLER 232 Concord Road

DO NOT VOTE IN THIS SPACE.
USE BLANK LINE BELOW FOR WRITE-IN.

.....

WRITE-IN SPACE ONLY

Turn Ballot Over to Continue Voting

DATES TO REMEMBER

Town elections are set by town bylaws with current elections held on the first Tuesday in May. In unusual cases, town elections can be moved slightly to correspond with a state special election.

You can pick up nomination papers starting on January 1 of the year of the election. From January 1 through the town elections, there are some specific deadlines that you should know. Although the exact dates of these deadlines vary from year to year, they occur on approximately the same day each year. The Town Clerk's office publishes a Candidates' Timeline in February. It includes the following dates:

- Last day to submit nomination papers to Registrars of Voters for certification: 49 days prior to the election, as mandated by state law.
- Last day to object to or withdraw nomination papers: 33 days prior to the election.
- Last day to register to vote or change party for Annual Town Election: 20 days prior to the election.
- Campaign finance reports due: 8 days prior to the election.
- Annual Town Election: first Tuesday in May.

Once the elections are over, there are a few more dates to keep in mind:

- Elected officers need to be sworn into office before their first meeting of the board.
- Campaign finance reports are due 30 days after the election.
- The Town Clerk sends out a reminder about campaign finance reports, including the year-end report which is due in January of the following year.

The League helps inform voters about the candidates in local elections. Questions for the Voters' Guide are sent out just after nomination papers are due, to be returned by late March or early April. Candidates' Night is held by the League in mid-April.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

Based on the competition in your race, a team can be helpful in sharing the burden of organizing and implementing your election activities. Try to gain the support of the town's influential people before they announce their support for your opponents.

As early as possible in your campaign, generate a list of potential financial and political supporters to contact personally. Add names to this list as the campaign progresses and the word of your candidacy spreads. Know that a good portion of campaign expenses may come out of your own pocket. Consider organizing a kick-off event to generate support and to raise money. Invite absolutely everyone, particularly those who may be wavering in their support for you.

Below is a suggested list of campaign activities. Not all campaigns will warrant this depth and breadth. Running in a contested race with contentious issues can require much time, money, and hard work. On the other hand, running in an uncontested race can require little effort and no money at all.

- *Campaign Manager*

You may want to recruit someone to help manage the overall progress of the campaign, freeing you up for other candidate activities.

- *Treasurer (Required by state law)*

If you collect or expend money on your campaign, you are required by law to have a treasurer.

The treasurer will control and record the flow of campaign contributions and expenses, and take on the responsibility of maintaining financial records and filling out the required campaign finance reports. Campaign expenses may include lawn signs, "Dear Friend" cards, and position mailings.

The treasurer will help you set up a campaign account at a local bank. Find a bank manager who has done this before.

- *Media*

An experienced person to organize your media outreach can be a real plus. They can help design lawn and campaign signs, format campaign literature and mailings, and take advantage of various electronic and social media for your campaign, such as creating an attractive Facebook page, using texting, Twitter, and other social media.

- *Lawn Signs*

You may want help to coordinate all activities associated with posting of lawn signs: maintaining a list of those who agree to have lawn signs, those who have them for distribution, and those who will plant the signs on your supporters' lawns. Signs may not be placed on public property, including along roads. Expect to need 150–300 lawn signs. Design your sign so that it can be reused at your next election. (For example, do not add dates to your signs, or use the slogan "It's time for a change!", if you might reuse the same signs in a re-election bid.) And don't forget to pick up your signs immediately after the election.

- *Visibility*

Consider maintaining a list of volunteer campaign sign holders, those supporters who will hold your campaign signs at selected times and locations showing their enthusiastic support for you. Popular times for these sign holders are the Friday evening, Saturday morning, and Monday evening before Election Day. Popular locations are Minot's Corner and the Town Common. Six- or eight-foot lengths of pine strapping are often used to elevate your lawn signs at sign holding times.

On Election Day, enlist sign holders throughout the day to greet voters at the five polling locations. (Remember Precincts 1 and 3 share the Abbot School gymnasium for their polling station.) By state law these signs cannot be held closer than 150 feet from the entrance to any polling location and they cannot be left unattended. These 150-foot boundaries are clearly marked on the pavement at all the schools. Try to get your sign holders lined up early before they are committed to other candidates.

- *Photography*

Look to your talented friends and neighbors to help create a professional look to your campaign literature and your Facebook page.

- *Publicity*

A savvy wordsmith can help craft your position statements and your letters to the editor so that your public image is clear and appealing. At the least, have someone proofread all campaign material and mailings to look for inadvertent misstatements and not-so-obvious blunders.

“Put together a list of people to be personally contacted by the candidates—these are the ‘movers and shakers’ in town, whose support you’ll need.”

Andrea Peraner-Sweet, Selectman, 2013

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance regulations at the state level specify how your campaign needs to handle and report any finances raised as part of your campaign. Even if you do not decide to raise or spend any money on your campaign, there are three campaign finance reports that must be filed with the Town Clerk’s office.

If you decide to raise and spend money as part of your campaign, there are procedures you need to follow for managing, spending, and reporting money in your campaign. You should be familiar with the state law governing this area. Both the Westford Town Clerk’s office and the state have put together guides that can help you through this process.

Start at <https://www.westfordma.gov/404/Candidate-Information>, or, simply search the town’s website (www.westfordma.gov) for “Candidate Information”. Prior to each election, the “Local Candidate Information” section will contain the timeline for the election. This includes the deadlines for filing the campaign finance

related forms. You can always contact the Town Clerk's office directly to ask any questions.

The state requires the filing of campaign finance reports. The forms will be mailed to you by the Town Clerk three times during the election season. There is a short form to file if you have no campaign organization and have collected and spent no money on your election. Every elected office holder must file an end-of-the-year report even if elected in a prior year.

PUBLICITY

Take every opportunity to build your brand and make yourself visible and your positions known. The type of position and campaign you are running will determine to what degree you pursue these activities, but when in doubt, more publicity is better than less.

- Attend events in town that provide an opportunity to speak to Westford voters.
- Send a press release to all media including the Lowell Sun, the Westford Eagle, and the Westford Patch announcing your candidacy.
- Contact WestfordCAT about taping a campaign announcement to be shown on their cable channels.
- Solicit the support of friends and neighbors to place signs on high-visibility, private properties in high-traffic areas in town.
- Create a broad distribution list if you choose to mail campaign flyers or cards. Include handwritten notes if possible.
- Put together a broad contact list for communicating via electronic media and use it to get out your message. On Election Day, email, text, and/or tweet your supporters to remind them to vote!
- Create a Facebook page, and get your friends and supporters to "Like" it. Post regularly.
- Place an ad in the local papers or online, though traditionally this is not often done in town elections.

LWV Voters' Guide

The League sponsors a Voters' Guide that is published in the Westford Eagle, and is available on the League's website, several weeks before the election. Each candidate is invited to supply via email a biography, a written response to two questions, and a photo. Examples from previous elections are available on the League website (lww.westford.org) under the "Get Involved!" section.

It is not required to respond to the League's questions for the Voters' Guide, but think about how a "No Response Received" printed in the Eagle will look amongst the responses of the other candidates.

LWV Candidates' Night

Whether or not you're running in a contested race, consider attending this event, since the moderator will announce that you declined the opportunity to participate if you choose not to be there. Voters deserve the opportunity to get to know you better and hear what you want to accomplish once you take office. The League will send you an invitation to participate which includes details about the event. Come prepared and understand that the event is recorded and will be repeatedly played on WestfordCAT, allowing for much broader audience viewing.

Both of these activities are opportunities to get your positions and personality before the voters for free.

"If possible, meet the other candidates prior to Candidates' Night. This helps the interaction during the event."

**Judy Culver, former School Committee member,
2013**

Other Tips

- Generate a timeline to organize your events, those that you control, such as letters to the editor, and those you cannot, such as Candidates' Night. Use the election timeline published on the town website as the basis for your scheduling.
- Learn the news media deadlines and plan accordingly.
- Consider scheduling campaign events such as: an announcement in the local media, supporters' letters to the editor (one a week would be ideal), town-wide mailings, posting the first campaign signs, sending "Dear Friend" cards, a kick-off party, and an election celebration.
- Keep press releases short and simple. Include most essential information up front, to plan for the potential of the article being cut back. Include a photo.

CAMPAIGNING

There are many ways to hit the campaign trail. Choose those activities that are most comfortable to you.

- Knocking on doors is one traditional way. Canvass neighborhoods, listen to the issues that are important to people, be sincere, and ask for their support.
- Attend as many public events as possible and introduce yourself to other attendees.
- Make the phone your friend. Obtain a list of potential supporters and call them. Introduce your candidacy, your position, and ask for their vote on Election Day.
- Have friends and supporters organize small house parties for a more personal meet and greet.

Whatever your style, build relationships and make a connection. Look for opportunities to seek common ground, and value all ideas brought to the table.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising can be one of the most awkward activities for most candidates. Although your budget may not be high, you will most likely need some amount of funds for day-to-day campaign activities. For example, you may need postage for vote cards, as well as thank you notes to those who made contributions to your campaign.

There are limits for donations. For more information on individual limits for donations refer to the town and state guides.

CONCLUSION

The League encourages you to consider running for local office. It can be an incredibly rewarding experience. Westford is very fortunate to have many dedicated volunteers, both elected and appointed. Whether you want to run to address a concern you have, or just to become more involved in the town, running for local office is a way to learn more about yourself and your town. The League hopes that this Guide starts you on the path to a successful run for local office.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Town of Westford

www.westfordma.gov

Town Clerk's page has election information

The Office of Campaign and Political Finance

One Ashburton Place, Room 411

Boston, MA 02108

(617) 979-8300 or 1-800-462-OCPF

www.ocpf.us

Massachusetts General Laws, Chapters 50–56 are available in local libraries and on the internet at:

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws>

Massachusetts Secretary of State Elections Division

www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleidx.htm



Join the League of Women Voters to Make a Difference!

There's never been a better time to join the League of Women Voters! Become a member today to make a difference in our community.

Your membership in the League will:

- Provide you information about government, voting events, and issues that matter
- Add your voice to advocacy for positive change
- Support the work of the League on the local, state, and national levels
- Give you experience in leadership, organizing, lobbying, researching, presenting, and facilitating

To join, go to lww.westford.org

The League's Mission Statement

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

For more information about the League

Westford: lww.westford.org

Massachusetts: <https://lwwma.org>

United States: www.lww.org

About the League in Westford

For over 50 years, the League of Women Voters of Westford, a group of committed women and men, has shared a common interest in “making democracy work.” Our involvement in the community has been far-reaching.

Your membership or donation helps the League fund these programs, among many others:

Candidate Events

We have organized annual local candidates’ nights since 1970, published the annual voters’ guide in the *Westford Eagle*, and set up candidate debates and forums.

Educational Programs

We organize high school government class attendance at the LWV Day on the Hill for students to see state government in action. We set up mock elections for elementary, middle school and high school students. We created a book and DVD—*Westford: A Sense of Community*—that illustrates Westford’s rich and diverse history.

Advocacy for Quality of Life Issues

We have studied a wide range of educational issues so that we can advocate for and spark improvements in our schools. Through active research and citizen education the League was instrumental in stopping the potential placement of a hazardous waste facility in Westford.

Voter and Public Service

We plan and host televised forums on important issues. We originated the Blue Pages in the *Westford Directory*. We post “Vote!” signs for all elections, and hold warrant reviews and post “Attend Town Meeting” signs, before all town meetings.



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WESTFORD

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