



April 17, 2026

Mayor Marc Laredo
Newton City Council
1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Mayor Laredo and Members of the Newton City Council:

Thank you for providing the League of Women Voters of Newton (LWVN) with the opportunity to participate in the working group formed by your office to explore alternatives to the City's current homegrown docket tracking software. As you know, since the publication of its [Municipal Transparency and Accountability Report](#), LWVN has been advocating for the City of Newton to embrace basic government transparency, including the proactive and public sharing of information about the management of the City's resources and City decision-making. As such, we are writing to express our disappointment in the working group's recommendation to select CivicPlus as the vendor to replace the current docket tracking software.

The working group was convened to consider two alternative software packages, CivicPlus and Legistar. From the standpoint of residents, business owners, community advocates, and any member of the public interested in following the work and decisions of the City Council, there is no comparison between CivicPlus and Legistar.

Providing the public with easy access to information about the work of the City Council, including a comprehensive view of the legislative docket, the council voting history, and a record of discussion in Council and committee meetings, is one of the most foundational elements of a transparent government. Transparency will empower residents who want to cast informed votes, participate in the civic process, and advocate for ways to make our city better. Legistar meets this test of transparency, while CivicPlus makes untenable time demands on any member of the public who wants to follow City Council activity.

As an example between these two systems, if you search "affordable housing" in Legistar, you get a list of every item of docketed legislation related to affordable housing along with a brief description of the context in which the item relates to affordable housing. Clicking on an item takes you to its full legislative history: a list by date of every council or committee meeting where this item was on the agenda with links to the agenda and minutes, all attachments, actions taken, and the full vote history by councilor. You could also search for a specific affordable housing project and immediately see its legislative history by date—the agendas, minutes and votes from all committee meetings (or how long it has been held in a given committee), and the final Council discussion and votes.

In contrast, CivicPlus has no public interface with the City Council docket. It is an agenda archive, and a user has to open each agenda to construct legislative history. If you perform the "affordable housing" search in CivicPlus, your search would return an agenda for every council and committee meeting for which the term "affordable housing" appeared on the agenda, which would likely number in the dozens. A user would then have to open each agenda returned in the search and manually scan to determine the context, links to attachments and minutes, and votes. Even searching for a specific affordable housing project would be time consuming and cumbersome. An item that is referred to two committees and held over on the agenda at multiple committee meetings could produce a dozen

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.

agendas and require an hour or more of time to determine its status. In addition, the archive is slow and cumbersome. Exiting an agenda returns the user to the top of the search results with no indication of which agendas have already been visited.

LWVN applauds the administration's goal of transforming the City's outdated and cumbersome website. The docket-tracker working group did not, however, receive guidance on the core value of transparency in making a decision that will greatly affect the ability of Newton residents to access important information. If public transparency is a primary goal of our docket tracking system, technical advances should produce a meaningful public benefit. The decision to select CivicPlus instead of Legistar appears primarily to have been based on cost – Legistar is initially approximately \$70,000 more than CivicPlus. While a majority of representatives to the working group preferred CivicPlus, no one favored it overwhelmingly and the technical comparison for back-end users was not drastically different. Cost is always important, but the difference between the two platforms is a small line item in the City's \$550 million budget. The real cost of the choice will be borne by Newton residents who will not have easy access to important public information. While Legistar is not the cheaper solution, it would be money well spent.

Mayor Laredo, you have stated many times during your campaign, in your inaugural speech, on our The League Presents program about municipal finance, and in your First 100 Days NewTV interview yesterday, that transparency is a goal of your administration and that cost should not be an overriding factor in decisions about transparency. We respectfully request that you reconsider the decision to proceed with CivicPlus as the City's docket tracking system and use Legistar instead.

Sincerely,

Frieda Dweck & Jane Harper

Frieda Dweck & Jane Harper
Co-Presidents
League of Women Voters, Newton

cc: The Newton Beacon
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