

# A Short History of the League of Women Voters of Canton

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In 1971 a group of Canton women gathered to start our League and put together the first “Know Your Town” booklet that year. In so doing, they became more aware of all aspects of our town government and services, and began focusing on what might be a concern worthy of a study.

When we became a full-fledged League in 1972, our first local study focused on the two land use boards (zoning and planning). After one and a half years of study of 10 CT towns of similar size, we came to consensus in March of 1974, recommending that the two boards join together, and that the town hire a full time paid engineer. The results of this study were presented to the Board of Selectmen, which appointed a commission the same year to study whether to combine the Boards. A part time engineer was hired, and in 1975 the Commission voted to recommend that the boards become combined. As you know the Boards have never been combined, but we do have a full time town planner. [Editor’s note: the Planning and Zoning Boards were combined in 2014.]

In 1975 our League decided to study a National League position which supported the availability of day care. The Farmington Valley had no day care at that time. Our League sent out a survey to the town residents assessing the need for day care. In April 1975 we came to a concurrence agreeing with the National League position and recommending action at the local level. We met with local nursery school leaders and CREC [Capitol Region Council of Education] officials. Our action made the community aware of the need and in October 1975, the first Canton day care center was opened.

Our League conducted two library studies. One was initiated in 1976, chaired by Marjorie Clarke, and the second occurred in 1987, co-chaired by Carol Barlow and Pat Polermo. The initial study looked at all aspects of library function as well as the facility. It lasted almost two years. Its consensus found that the Friends of the Library was underutilized, that the Library Board members needed to be broad based with limited terms, that staff vacancies needed to be filled with professional librarians, and that the facility needed to be brought up to American Library Association standards. When the results were shared with the Library Board, the reception was positive though the Board did not agree with all of the results.

In 1987 the second study focused on the library facility itself. In January 1989 the consensus meeting was held after almost two years of study. It recommended that a new library be built and that the Library Board should assume leadership for this project. The library needed to be close to the schools, to Mills Pond, be convenient for the elderly, close to Routs 44 and 179, and have adequate parking. Six months later the Library Board designated a committee to study this issue (nine League members were in this group. In September 1992, the Library Board task force looked into using Mills Pond property for the new site. In March 1997, the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance selected the former Canton Elementary school as the site.

Since 1972 our League has completed 18 local studies [Editor’s note: now 19], 10 national studies, and 12 state studies. It has revised “Know Your Town” 3 times, [now 4] [link here](#) roughly every 10 years. It has sponsored a Candidates Night yearly since the fall of 1972, and has registered Canton High School seniors to vote since 1978. It has sponsored forums, panels and speakers on a variety of topics, as well

as participated 3 times in a High School Social Studies town government study. This has taken a huge amount of time and dedication of our members, and has been very rewarding.

Each of our local studies has impacted the town because each was thoughtfully prepared after lengthy comparative study, with facts and figures presented to the appropriate Board or Commission. Usually they provided impetus for the town agency to act.

It has been exciting to see that a small group of determined individuals could make a difference in helping to improve our town. The Canton League is what grass roots Democracy is all about.