

October LWVCC Concord Journal Column: Sense and Sensibility

In 1811, “A Lady” enjoyed seeing her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, in print. The lady was, of course, Jane Austen. In this work, Austen famously explores the consequences of excessive emotion (“sensibility”) against singular prudence and reasoning (“sense”) in the lives of her two main characters—Elinor and Marianne. Eventually, although both women suffer and grow, they learn to respect each other’s behavior and moderate their own.

We are living in a time, as was evident at our Special Town Meeting, when the blend of sense and sensibility are both needed and often in evidence. The issues at the Meeting were, for many, unexpectedly intense, as land rights as old as Austen’s novels were debated and fresh land rights were considered. The delicate balance—between strongly held feelings and reasoned comportment—that Austen ultimately counsels in her novel—essentially prevailed. [add or not: This same tension animates many modern political exchanges.]

One of the most important contributions to our Town that the League of Women Voters offers each year is the First Friday series—a monthly forum on important, local issues. On October 5th, we had a remarkably fine forum on the selection process for the Concord’s next Town Manager. Having enjoyed the informed and wise leadership of Chris Whelan for twenty-five years, our next Town Manager will face a considerably different town than the one Chris first encountered in 1994. Interested folks can view the session on the MMN youtube channel [Clik this link](#)

The next First Friday, on November 2nd, at 9:15AM, at Fowler Library, Main Street, West Concord, will address the always complicated yet important topic of Affordable Housing. This is an issue whose rules and regulations keep being revised, even as we work to meet Concord’s changing needs. For many years, Affordable Housing has been a subject of at least one Town Meeting Warrant article—from Junction Village to Black Birch. However, this First Friday will not be dealing with funding concerns; rather it will provide an opportunity to help citizens develop a background to understand articles when they are presented at future Town Meetings.

The keynote speaker will be Ms. Chris Kluchman, Housing Choice Program Director of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and former Director of Land Use Management in the Town of Westford. Ms. Kluchman will provide attendees with a broad look at current priorities, trends, and initiatives in Affordable Housing statewide. Panel members will provide information on the housing section of Concord’s most recent Long-Range plan, a glossary of housing terms and definitions, a summary of all of the Concord committees and organizations addressing Affordable Housing, and an explanation of the term “Local Preference.” The panel includes Stephan Bader, member of the LWVCC and League Observer to Concord Housing committees; Barbara Morse, housing representative to Concord’s Comprehensive Long-Range Plan Committee; and Charles Phillips, long-time advocate for

affordable housing, and member of the Concord Housing Foundation. The event is open to all, and there will be an ample opportunity for questions from attendees.

As well, the League has collaborated with the Concord Museum to bring Barbara Berenson, who will be speaking on “Votes for Women: Massachusetts Leaders in the Woman Suffrage Movement,” on Monday, November 5th, 7-8 PM at Wright Tavern. She is a dynamic presenter. There is limited space, so sign-up in advance by going to the Museum’s Website.

Regardless of the issue we are discussing, contemplative study and common sense—which as Mark Twain reminded us is uncommon—can and probably should drive our collective inquiries. And as we each head to the polls on November 6th, may thoughtful deliberation and good sense guide our votes.

Democracy is not a spectator sport.

Diane Proctor

President, LWVCC