

Citizen Engagement Corner

Brookline Students – Toot Your Horn!

League of Women Voters of Brookline

Voter turnout in mid-term elections usually drops dramatically. But, according to the United States Election Project, in 2018 almost half of possible voters actually voted, a huge figure for U.S. midterm elections. Compare that with just 36.7 percent in 2014, and 41 percent in 2010. This increase was also reflected in Brookline's November 2018 turnout, when 68 percent of eligible voters went to the polls. Even so, one precinct had a truly noteworthy turnout.

In Precinct 7, participation increased by almost 60 percent over 2014. Why? All signs point to the well-received "tooting of horns" by Tufts University students, who as a project with their Tufts University political science professor, Eitan Hersh, a resident of Precinct 7, walked around the precinct on Election Day. Using a loudspeaker, they announced, "It's Election Day. Don't forget to vote. Polls close at 8. The polling station is on Park Street." The initiative piqued curiosity, brought smiles to peoples' faces, and reminded and motivated them to vote.

Some barriers to citizen engagement in Brookline include the fact that it has been estimated that close to 20 percent of residents turnover each year. Also, most candidates or canvassers don't try to or manage to get into large apartment buildings, so the one-on-one engagement that could motivate voters is absent. In addition, the Brookline TAB is not delivered everywhere, including to some of these larger buildings. If it were read regularly, it could potentially pique people's interest in the hot issues in town. The Voters Guide, produced by the Brookline League of Women Voters for each annual election, is an insert in the newspaper just before Election Day. This year it was April 25. (Of course, people can always read the content online at <https://wickedlocal.com/brookline> and get the Voters Guide at <http://lwvbrookline.org>.)

So, to follow up on last year's Precinct 7 success, Professor Hersh and the Precinct 7 Organizing Committee (a neighborhood group) are co-sponsoring with the League of Women Voters of Brookline, a similar nonpartisan initiative to increase voter turnout for the May 7 town election. They are looking for sixth- to 12th-grade volunteers, with adult coordination, to walk around a precinct in groups of two-three with a bullhorn. They will remind neighbors (loudly, but politely) to vote, when to vote, and where to vote, and will have copies of the Voters Guide available. As proven last year, students with bullhorns can help! The Brookline Police Department is aware of the effort and will be given information about the student routes in advance.

The volunteer commitment is to attend a training session plus a one-hour shift after school on May 7. Parental permission is required. Parents or teachers of interested students should contact Eitan Hersh (eitan.hersh@gmail.com) for more information.

We should all salute Brookline students and toot our horns for the many forms of civic engagement in which they are participating — just a sampling here, and more to come in the next Engaged Citizen Corner article.

Prepared and submitted by a member of the League of Women Voters of Brookline. The League is a nonpartisan organization that encourages informed and active participation in government and that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy.