



March 14, 2012

Ms. Nan Berke, Co-Chair
The Administrative Committee
258 Nelson Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Mr. Michael Pollack, Co-Chair
The Administrative Committee
180 Rock Creek Lane
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Ms. Berke and Mr. Pollack,

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (the "League") thanks Ms. Berke for taking the time to attend our membership meeting on February 6th to review the School Board Nominating Committee ("SBNC") election that took place on January 17th. We appreciate your detailed report regarding the election, as well as your outstanding dedication in carrying out your duties this year as Co-Chairs of the Administrative Committee (the "Committee"). In addition to the items mentioned throughout this letter, the League commends you for:

- stepping in to lead the Committee when no one else was ready or willing to do so; and
- creating procedures, instructions and records relating to the Committee's work to help guide the Committee in the future and ensure continuity of leadership.

We have highlighted below several key recommendations, followed by more detailed comments and recommendations.

Recommendations

- Educate voters about how to vote by mail-in ballot and clarify the mail-in-ballot instructions to minimize disqualification of ballots that do not comply with the new procedures.
- Extend the deadline for mail-in ballots and create a written set of instructions for counting mail-in ballots.

- Continue to work with the Procedure Committee on ways to educate voters about the non-partisan process.
- Continue to brainstorm methods of improving recruitment of candidates for the SBNC.
- Direct SBNC candidates before the election not to electioneer at the polling place on election day.

Detailed Comments and Recommendations

Administrative Committee Membership

The League commends the Committee for having several active members who participated in recruiting candidates and running the election. The Committee included three appointees from the Scarsdale Forum, one appointee from the Scarsdale Neighborhood Association Presidents (“SNAP”), and two members appointed by the Co-Chairs. The SBNC Resolution (the “Resolution”) requires the appointment of three at-large Committee members. While we commend the Co-Chairs for appointing two at-large members of the committee, the League recommends that in the future the Chair or Co-Chairs name all three at-large members by reaching out to active members of the community (e.g., former SBNC members from prior years).

It is disappointing that SNAP appointed only one member rather than the three appointees required by the Resolution, and the League hopes that in the future SNAP will fulfill its responsibilities under the Resolution and appoint more members.

To ensure the continued active involvement of Committee members in the election process, the League reiterates its previous recommendation that members of the SBNC be advised in advance regarding what their responsibilities on the Committee will be following the completion of their terms on the SBNC.

Continuity of Leadership

When this year’s Co-Chairs volunteered to head the Committee, they stepped into a leadership vacuum, inherited sparse records, and faced several daunting challenges. In order to prevent this situation from recurring, the Committee took steps to document its work more thoroughly and to provide instructions for next year’s Committee. The League applauds the Committee for establishing and documenting procedures and for creating detailed and extensive records. These efforts will help smooth the transition to next year’s leadership.

The League recommends that in order to ensure continuity of leadership in the future, the Committee maintain its records on an online electronic site accessible via the internet, and in a permanent place in the Scarsdale Library, as required by the

Resolution. The League also recommends that the Committee research the viability of maintaining electronic records both as password-protected links to the SBNC website and as digitized documents stored at the Scarsdale Library.

Candidate Recruitment

The League commends the Committee for recruiting a full slate -- two candidates for each vacancy -- for all school districts except Quaker Ridge, where there were three candidates for two vacancies. The League notes that the fourth Quaker Ridge candidate dropped out shortly before the election, on December 8th, leaving little time to recruit another candidate for that vacancy. Nevertheless, the League encourages the Committee in the future, when faced with last-minute withdrawals of candidates, to maintain a full slate of candidates by appointing someone as a candidate as provided for in Section II(C)(3)(c) of the Resolution.

The League commends the Committee for its extensive efforts to recruit candidates, such as meeting with the PT Council, attending PTA meetings, coordinating with SNAP, developing flyers to promote SBNC candidacy, attending High School parent-teacher conference nights, submitting press releases to various local news organizations, and distributing e-mails to local civic organizations.

The League also commends the Committee's continued work after the election on the issue of candidate recruitment, including its scheduling of a brainstorming meeting on the issue, and its proposal for a High School senior options project on the non-partisan process that would include videos to be used for candidate recruitment. The League encourages the Committee to continue working to improve candidate recruitment.

Resolution Amendments

The Joint Committee proposed six amendments to the Resolution, all of which were passed by voters on January 17th. The League commends the Joint Committee for making public its proposed amendments and for giving members of the community the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendments, as required by the Resolution. The League recommends that in the future, to increase community involvement in the amendment process even further, the Joint Committee reach out to community organizations, such as the League, well in advance of the public comment deadline to encourage these organizations to comment on the amendments.

Publicity and Community Outreach

In addition to the Committee's efforts to attract candidates for the SBNC described above, the Committee publicized information regarding the SBNC nominees, the Resolution amendments, election-day details, the availability of mail-in ballots, and election results in several print and online media outlets, through PTA e-blasts, and through e-blasts from other community organizations. In addition, the Committee placed editorials in the Scarsdale Inquirer and Scarsdale10583.com promoting SBNC candidacy and asking people to vote, had an information table at a newcomer's event

and at parent-teacher conference nights, attended PTA and PT council meetings, reached out to SNAP, and described the non-partisan process in the Notice to Vote brochure distributed to every Scarsdale household. The Committee also created an informative SBNC website, which received close to 3,000 hits. The League commends the Committee for these extensive efforts to educate residents about the non-partisan process and the role of the SBNC, and to publicize information regarding the SBNC nominees and the election.

The League also commends the Committee for engaging in discussions over the summer with the Chair of the Procedure Committee and League representatives to explore ways to increase voter awareness and voter turnout. One result of this meeting was the coordination with the Procedure Committee on a flyer that was handed out at a newcomer's event in September. Because greater community awareness is integral to improving active participation of citizens in the election process, the League encourages the Committee to continue working with the Procedure Committee on ways to educate residents about the non-partisan process.

The Vote

Voter Turnout

This year, 528 people voted in the SBNC election, representing a 39 percent increase over last year and an apparent record-high turnout for an SBNC election. The League commends the Committee for this significant increase in voter turnout. Nevertheless, because the number of voters still represents only a small fraction of eligible voters, the League encourages the Committee to continue its efforts to increase turnout by educating the public about the non-partisan process and the availability of mail-in ballots.

Electioneering

The League is concerned about reports that certain candidates lingered and electioneered in and around the polling area during the election, as these actions could affect the privacy and integrity of the election process. We urge the Committee and Joint Committee to prohibit such conduct through a Resolution amendment and/or through written and oral directives to the candidates prior to the election.

Mail-in Ballots

This year, 25 percent of votes in the SBNC election were cast by mail-in ballot, up from 21 percent last year. The League applauds the increased use of the mail-in ballot, which is a valuable tool for raising voter turnout.

Last year, the League recommended that the Committee implement procedures in connection with the use of mail-in ballots to help safeguard the integrity of the election process. The Joint Committee proposed amendments to the Resolution that codified these practices, and in fact the Committee implemented many of these procedures in the 2012 election, such as providing that mail-in ballots be delivered exclusively by U.S.

Mail or a nationally recognized courier service; requiring voters to sign sealed ballots across the back of the envelope; and requiring the Committee to cross-check the names of mail-in voters against the list of voters who signed in to vote. The League commends the Committee for taking these important steps.

Nevertheless, it appears that close to eleven percent of mail-in ballots were disqualified because they were so improperly addressed that they could not be tied to qualified voters who had not previously voted in the election. Many more were counted but were not fully in compliance with the instructions. Next year, when the new mail-in ballot procedures are officially included in the Resolution, the Committee must disqualify mail-in ballots received in envelopes without a voter's name, signature, and home address on the outside. It is thus imperative that the Committee educate voters about the mail-in ballot instructions to ensure greater compliance with the new procedures. For example, the Committee could post a sample of a completed ballot and envelope on the SBNC website.

The League also urges the Committee to create a uniform set of instructions for counting mail-in ballots to ensure that all ballot counters conform to the same objective standard during the vote count, and to ensure strict compliance with the mail-in ballot procedures codified in the Resolution.

Finally, this year's SBNC election took place the day after a Monday holiday when the post office was closed, resulting in confusion over when the mail-in ballots were due. The Resolution currently provides that ballots must be received by the Chair of the Committee no later than 5 p.m. on the day immediately prior to election day. The League recommends that the Joint Committee propose to voters an amendment to the Resolution to provide that mail-in ballots must be received in the SBNC's post office box no later than 4:30 p.m. the *day of* the election. Such an amendment would not only resolve confusion over the deadline, but it might also increase voter participation by providing an extra day for voters to mail their ballots.

Election Date, Signage, Hours, and Parking

The League commends the Committee for continuing to schedule the SBNC election on the same date as a PT Council meeting at the Middle School.

With regard to signage, the League recognizes that the Committee posted signs about the vote on the streets adjacent to the polling place and on the doors of the polling place, and recommends that in the future the Committee take steps to ensure that the signs list the correct voting hours.

The League notes that the polling place became overcrowded during the peak hours of 6:45 to 8:00 p.m. The League recommends that in the future, the Committee assign more than two poll workers during this busy time period.

The League commends the Committee for designating reserved parking spots for at least part of election day, and recommends that in future elections, it attempt to secure reserved parking for voters during all voting hours.

Fundraising

The Committee inherited a financial shortfall, and started the 2011-12 year with only one-third of the funds needed to run the election. The League commends the Committee for its success in raising enough money to pay for the election despite its initial shortfall.

The League also commends the Committee for starting a new fundraising cycle after the election with the goal of raising enough money to fund next year's election, thus enabling next year's Committee to focus on the important tasks of preparing for and running the SBNC election.

The League acknowledges that the Committee's directed fundraising efforts – aimed at past donors and participants in the SBNC – were more effective than the request for donations in the Notice to Vote brochure that was sent to all households. Nevertheless, the League suggests that in the future, the Committee expand its directed fundraising efforts to reach a broader cross-section of the community.

Conclusion

The League lauds the Committee's dedication to the non-partisan process. The League hopes the Committee will view this letter as a tool to facilitate discussion on strategies to improve the system and that the Committee will share it with the incoming Chair and Committee. The League encourages the Committee to remain committed to the continuous improvement of the SBNC election system. Overall, the League congratulates the Committee on a successful election.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Bassin
Chair, School Election System
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

Marylou Green
President
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

cc: Joshua Glantz, Incoming Chair, Administrative Committee