



March 5, 2013

Mr. Joshua Glantz, Co-Chair
The Administrative Committee
1 Claremont Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Mr. Wayne Aaron, Co-Chair
The Administrative Committee
26 Oxford Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Mr. Glantz and Mr. Aaron,

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (the “League”) thanks your Co-Vice-Chairs, Ms. Korins and Ms. Ruta, for taking the time to attend our membership meeting on February 4th to review the School Board Nominating Committee (“SBNC”) election that took place on January 16th. 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:

- Leading and organizing an involved and hard-working Committee;
- Being highly responsive to the recommendations made by the League in prior years; and
- Diligently recruiting candidates and publicizing and running the election despite challenges presented first by Superstorm Sandy, which occurred a few weeks before the petition deadline, and then by a snow storm and school delay on the day of the election.

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

Recommendations

- Utilize the Committee’s website as a means of communicating real-time information to residents and keeping residents informed about election-day details in the event of snow or other emergencies.

- Work with SNAP to address SNAP's participation on the Committee and assistance with the Committee's fundraising efforts.
- Continue to send the Notice to Vote brochure and, if financially feasible, include a copy of the mail-in-ballot in the brochure.
- 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 and publicizing the use of mail-in ballots.

Detailed Comments and Recommendations

Administrative Committee Membership

The League commends the Committee for having many active, involved members who participated in recruiting candidates and in publicizing and running the election. The League also commends the Committee for efficiently delegating tasks to various Committee members.

Participation on the Committee by former SBNC members was particularly high this year, and was encouraged by the Co-Chairs when they met with outgoing SBNC members last Spring to advise them about their duties on the Committee. The League commends the Co-Chairs for holding this meeting, and recommends that this practice continue in the future. The League also commends the Committee for utilizing scheduled conference calls as a means of achieving greater participation by Committee members.

The Committee included three appointees from the Scarsdale Forum and two community-at-large 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 did not appoint any members to the Committee despite the Resolution's provision that it appoint three members. The League notes, however, that SNAP did aid the Committee's publicity efforts. Nevertheless, the League hopes that in the future SNAP will fulfill its responsibilities under the Resolution to appoint members to the Committee, and recommends that in order to facilitate this participation, Committee chairs or co-chairs meet with SNAP members at one of SNAP's regularly scheduled meetings to discuss SNAP's participation on the Committee.

Continuity of Leadership

The League notes that there was a smooth leadership transition this year due to the extensive efforts of last year's Committee Co-Chairs to create records and written procedures that could be passed along to this year's Committee.

Candidate Recruitment

The League commends the Committee for its extensive efforts to recruit a full slate of candidates despite the challenges posed by Superstorm Sandy, which occurred a few weeks before the candidate petition deadline. The League commends the Committee for its active and organized focus on personal outreach to potential candidates, and for contacting those who had expressed interest in serving in prior years. The League also notes that in addition to focusing on personal outreach, the Committee also recruited candidates by reaching out to the public through its website, presentations at PTA meetings, PTA e-blasts, representatives at parent-teacher nights, and articles in various local news outlets.

Although the Committee did not reach its goal of having a full slate of four candidates in all school districts by the petition deadline, the League recognizes the tremendous disruption the storm caused over a period of at least two weeks, and that the shortfall in candidates could have been caused, at least in part, by the storm. The League commends the Committee for appointing candidates pursuant to Section II(C)(3)(c) of the Resolution after the petition deadline, in an ongoing effort to have a fully contested election.

The League notes that the final slate consisted of four candidates – a full slate – in three school districts and three candidates – one short of a full slate – in two school districts. Because of the importance of holding fully contested elections, the League encourages the Committee to continue working to improve the candidate recruitment process.

Resolution Amendments

The Joint Committee proposed ten amendments to the Resolution, all of which were passed by voters on January 16th. 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.

Several of the proposed amendments codified the League's prior recommendations to the Committee, and the League commends the Joint Committee for its responsiveness to the League's concerns.

The League also commends the Committee for using its public comment meeting as an opportunity to orient and educate the SBNC candidates and to discuss with them appropriate conduct with regard to their candidacies.

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, and election results in print and online media outlets, through PTA e-blasts, and through e-blasts from other community organizations.

In addition, the Committee described the non-partisan process and presented the candidates' biographies and proposed Resolution amendments in the Notice to Vote brochure distributed to every Scarsdale household. The League commends the Committee for producing this informative brochure, and recommends that it continue mailing hard-copy brochures to all Scarsdale households in order to publicize the election to all Scarsdale residents. The League also recommends that, if financially feasible, the Committee include a copy of the mail-in ballot in the brochure in order to publicize the mail-in ballot option to all residents.

The Committee also continued to host an informative SBNC website, which you indicated received 3,000 hits in the past year. The League commends the Committee for its comprehensive website, and recommends that it utilize the website as a means of communicating important, real-time information to the public on a regular basis.

The League also reiterates its recommendation that the Committee work with the Procedure Committee on ways to educate residents about the non-partisan process.

The Vote

Voter Turnout

This year, 340 people voted in the SBNC election, representing a marked decrease of 35.6 percent since last year's election. The League recognizes that much of this decrease was undoubtedly due to a snow storm the morning of the election, the resulting two-hour school delay, and confusion over the school delay due to a problem with the school district's robocall system. The League commends the Committee for running the election in an effective and organized manner in spite of these challenges.

Nevertheless, the League recommends that to address potential obstacles to voter turnout in the future, the Committee implement a plan for communicating election updates and get-out-the-vote messages directly to voters on the day of the election. For instance, the Committee could post up-to-date information about the election (*e.g.*, stating that the election is going forward despite the weather and listing poll hours and location) prominently on the home page of the SNBC website, and work with neighborhood association and PTA presidents to send e-mail blasts to their lists. Indeed, the League recommends that even in the absence of bad weather, the

Committee use all avenues available on the day of the election to remind the public to vote.

Moreover, because the number of voters continues to represent only a small fraction of eligible voters, the League encourages the Committee to work on increasing voter turnout by educating the public about the non-partisan process and the availability of mail-in ballots.

Mail-in Ballots

Approximately 18 percent of votes in this year's SBNC election were cast by mail-in ballot, down from approximately 25 percent last year. The League notes that the mail-in ballot is a valuable tool for raising voter turnout, and urges the Committee to study ways to publicize the use of mail-in ballots in the SBNC election. For instance, as mentioned above, the League suggests that, if financially feasible, the Committee include a copy of the mail-in ballot in the Notice to Vote brochure sent to all Scarsdale households.

This year, the Committee posted an example of a completed mail-in ballot envelope on its website, and also provided extensive written directions to ballot-counters on how to count mail-in ballots. The League commends the Committee for providing these explicit instructions both to voters and to ballot-counters. In contrast with last year, when many mail-in ballots were disqualified because of irregularities, only two mail-in ballots were disqualified for a lack of signature across the back of the envelope.

Election Date, Signage, Hours, and Parking

The League commends the Committee for continuing to schedule the SBNC election on the same date as a joint PTA/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 acknowledges the challenges presented on election day by the school delay, snow removal efforts, and increased demands on the school custodians. Nevertheless, the League recommends that in the future the Committee take steps to ensure that the signs on the street list the voting hours and the purpose of the election, and also that the Committee post additional signs outside the Middle School directing voters to the exact voting location in the school.

The League commends the Committee for increasing the number of poll workers during peak hours to alleviate overcrowding problems and for providing poll workers with written instructions for counting ballots.

The League recognizes the disruption caused by the snow storm and school delay, but nevertheless recommends that in future elections, the Committee attempt to secure reserved parking for voters, using pre-made "Reserved for Voters" signs, during voting hours.

Fundraising

Because of the fundraising efforts of last year's Committee, this year's Committee had enough funds to pay for the election. The League commends the Committee for starting a new fundraising cycle after the election in order to fund next year's election. The League notes that the Committee has made initial efforts to raise those funds, such as requesting contributions in the Notice to Vote brochure that was sent to all households and obtaining contributions from current and former members of the Committee and SBNC.

The League acknowledges the difficulties of raising money for the SBNC election from the general public. The League suggests that in order to broaden its donor base, the Committee publicize its need for financial contributions whenever it conducts its other publicity and outreach, such as its press releases, letters to the editor, and e-blasts before and after the election. The League also recommends that the Committee continue to use e-mail lists from SNAP and the neighborhood associations, as well as the Committee's own donor database, as resources for seeking funds.

The League also notes that this year, certain members of the Committee underwrote miscellaneous costs associated with running the election and supporting the Committee's functions, and thus the Committee's stated operating expenses were less than its actual operating expenses. Since future Committees might not be able to underwrite these miscellaneous costs, the League recommends that all of the Committee's expenses be documented and incorporated into its annual accounting, so the Committee can realistically project future expenses and establish fundraising goals.

Conclusion

The League lauds the Committee's dedication to the non-partisan process and commitment to improving the SBNC election system. The League hopes the Committee will view this letter as a tool to facilitate discussion on strategies for continuing to improve the 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: Ms. Janet Korins
Ms. Jyoti Ruta
Incoming Co-Chairs, Administrative Committee