



February 27, 2020

Ms. Felicia Block, Chair
School Board Nominating Committee Administrative Chair
PO Box 172H
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Also sent via email to: Felicia Block @ f_liss@hotmail.com

Dear Ms. Block,

The League of Women Voters ("League") thanks you for your presentation at our membership meeting on January 28th, to review the School Board Nominating Committee ("SBNC") election that took place on January 14th. We commend you for your service as Chair of the Administrative Committee ("AC"). We also commend you for the report prepared for our membership meeting, and for your thoughtful responses to the questions presented at the following question and answer session. The League commends the dedication, commitment, and hard work of members of the committee.

The League is invested in its independent oversight role of monitoring the SBNC elections to ensure transparency, organization and legitimacy of the elections, as those elections are the contested component of Scarsdale's nonpartisan election system. Through its study and evaluation of the process, the League provides independent review and recommendations.

The statement below documents the results of the League's consensus meeting immediately following your presentation. It serves to highlight recommendations for future SBNC elections and reflect on AC practices currently in place.

Recruitment and Publicity

As stated in the information report, the goal of the AC was to have a full slate of candidates for each neighborhood. The AC's extensive efforts led to non-contested elections for each neighborhood. The League understands that recruitment efforts were particularly challenging this year because the AC was short-staffed and had decided to devote much of their time and energy to amending the resolution. According to the report at the information session, anecdotal evidence suggests challenges for recruitment include many of the same reasons noted in previous years; including, but not limited to, community members' reluctance to run in a contested election against neighbors, the five-year volunteer commitment, and the timing of the SBNC meetings on Sunday afternoons.

However, despite the struggle to find volunteers, the League strongly encourages the Committee to maintain the goal of a contested election in order to ensure a democratic process in the SBNC election; a process wherein nonpartisan Nominating Committee members are “elected by the voters.”¹ Historically, the goal of contested elections has been a central part of the SBNC process. While there may be individual elections or periods of time when contested elections are not possible, the League believes that the goal should remain.²

As indicated in the information session, the AC chose to publish an abbreviated postal mailer this year due to financial and sustainability considerations. The League understands the constraints faced by the AC in publishing information on candidates and amendments to the public, and appreciates the effort undertaken to provide paper copies of amendments at locations throughout the village, including the Library Loft and Village Hall. As the League supports and promotes informed citizenship, the League would like to emphasize the continued importance of ensuring that there is full candidate and amendment information accessible to the public in multiple formats.

The League recommends that the AC consider the following:

- Expanding outreach to the broader community of residents, beyond parents of the school-aged population. Reaching out to residents in Scarsdale who do not yet have, or no longer have, children in the school system for candidate recruitment, specifically through village sports’ organizations, senior groups, preschools and religious establishments. Furthermore, the League suggests strengthening this effort, with outreach to additional Scarsdale community groups that the SBNC had contacted in the past but not in recent years, for SBNC awareness and candidate recruitment.
- Ensuring timely website updates during all phases of the election process. The website is vital for recruitment, voter education and fundraising purposes.

Candidate recruiting efforts began early, in April, with contact to potential candidates, and more formally in September, with the first major publicity efforts. As indicated in the report provided, in the prior two years, all candidates for the SBNC were recruited via personal outreach. Of note, this year, 20% of the candidates stepped forward without personal outreach due to the publicity efforts of the AC. The AC undertook efforts to recruit through local news media, PTA publications, neighborhood associations, and notably, social media. Information provided for the information session notes that the SBNC website traffic was the highest it had been in four years, outside of 2018 (the year of a contested Board of Education election).

The League commends the AC for the following:

- Using social media as a tool for recruiting and publicizing the election.

¹ From the SBNC website scarsdalesbnc.com/home-2

² From the LWVS Consensus Statement on Proposed Amendments to the SBNC Resolution 2020

- Maintaining and reviewing the recorded list of persons contacted to run for the SBNC for accuracy, and updating or deleting names no longer relevant.

Voting Procedures

Despite the importance of the election with twenty-one proposed amendments on the ballot, voter turnout was low this year with 137 votes cast, a significant decrease from the turnout in 2019 of 240 votes cast.

Regarding notification of election results, the *League continues to recommend that the following be considered:*

- Communicating in advance of the election to all involved parties the policy for candidate notification of election results in the instance where the ballot count is not completed in a timely manner.
- Codifying a hierarchy of notice of election results in the following order: first, all candidates are notified; second, the SBNC website is updated with election results; and third, the media is notified.

Additionally, this year, the *League recommends that the AC consider:*

- Conducting post-election analysis and looking at any trends from the Resolution Amendment Election results.
- Monitoring the ongoing impact of changes to the Resolution on the work of the SBNC.
- Requesting “Vote Here” signage be placed in prominent locations along the road.

The *League commends the AC for the following:*

- Using clear signage at the polling location, including “Voter Parking” signs.
- Placing small cards at voting stations encouraging voters to donate to the SBNC that included the website address and a QR code.

Fundraising

In light of continued reporting by the AC that the financial situation of the SBNC is dire, the League acknowledges the initiative undertaken this season by the current AC to reduce expenses, specifically by decreasing the size of the mailer, thereby reducing printing costs. As noted in the report, the expectation is that mailing costs will continue to rise.

Given these considerations, the League encourages the AC to explore other avenues for fundraising, including perhaps researching the possibility of corporate sponsorship. Additionally, the League recommends that the AC evaluate the timeline of its efforts, including soliciting support earlier in the process to avoid taxing the AC with the dual role of simultaneously raising funds and recruiting candidates.

Leadership Transition

The League strongly values continuity and the preservation of institutional knowledge from year to year. Succession of leadership roles is a key method to ensure such matters are retained within an organization. The League acknowledges that this is aspirational for many organizations and due to unforeseen circumstances, not always possible. However because of the importance of continuity and institutional knowledge preservation, the League believes that codifying the vice chair's succession to the chair of the Committee should remain.³

As leadership succession is no longer codified in the Resolution due to the passage of Amendment 5, the *League encourages the following*:

- Preservation of records, and continuity from year to year to preserve institutional knowledge.
- Efforts be made to codify procedures regarding leadership transition in order to strengthen the overall democratic process and integrity of the SBNC.

As shared at the information session, this year the AC held a pre-meeting to orient members new to the AC regarding their responsibilities. The League commends the AC for the proposed idea to formalize the orientation process for SBNC third year members as they move onto the AC. Institutional knowledge can be preserved by raising awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the AC.

Policies and Procedures

Under consideration for voters this year were twenty-one amendments to the SBNC Resolution. The League devoted extensive study to the proposed policy changes, and the examination of each amendment can be found in the [LWVS Consensus on Proposed Amendments to the SBNC Resolution](#), dated January 10, 2020.

In addition to the study of amendments, as in prior years, the *League continues to recommend that the following be considered*:

- Creating a written conflict of interest policy or publishing any written conflict of interest that may already exist to preserve the legitimacy of the non-partisan process.
- Considering whether appointed members (TVCC, SNAP, and at-large appointees) should have a more defined role.

The *League encourages consideration of the following*:

- Discussing the public roles and limits, if any, of individual members of the SBNC once the committee as a whole has nominated its slate.

³ From the LWVS Consensus Statement on Proposed Amendments to the SBNC Resolution 2020.

- Adding additional time to the SBNC Resolution amendment process that would allow voters to fully understand the nature of the changes and the rationale behind the decision-making process.⁴

When operating at a fully-functional level, the League views the SBNC election as an outstanding example of civic participation. The non-partisan process to select the most qualified school board candidates is an integral part of our community. The League hopes that the AC will view this letter as a tool to facilitate discussion of strategies for continuing to improve the system.

The League requests that you disseminate this statement to all members of SBNC and AC. The League thanks you for all of your work in your capacity as a volunteer.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature on the left is a stylized, cursive 'A' followed by a long horizontal stroke that loops back under the 'A'. The signature on the right is a more complex cursive signature, appearing to read 'Leah Dembitzer'.

Amber Yusuf
School Election Portfolio Chair
League of Women Voters Scarsdale

Leah Dembitzer
President
League of Women Voters Scarsdale

⁴ From the LWVS Consensus Statement on Proposed Amendments to the SBNC Resolution 2020, “The League believes proposed amendments should be finalized and publicized in sufficient time for the community to fully understand the nature of the changes and the rationale behind the decision-making process.”