



February 7, 2021

Ms. Kathleen Gray
School Board Nominating Committee Administrative Committee Election Chair
PO Box 172H
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Also sent via email to: kgrayclapp@aol.com

Dear Ms. Gray,

The League of Women Voters ("League") thanks you for your presentation at our membership meeting on January 25th to review the School Board Nominating Committee ("SBNC") election that took place on January 12th. We commend you for your service as Election 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 subsequent question and answer session. The League commends the dedication, commitment, and hard work of members of the AC in recruiting candidates and running the SBNC election during this COVID-19 pandemic amidst evolving public health guidance and restrictions.

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 held via Zoom. It serves to highlight recommendations for future SBNC elections and reflect on AC practices currently in place.

Member Participation

As stated in the information report, there were more participating members this year than last year (20 participating members as opposed to 5 participating members), and member participation in candidate recruitment was adequate.

Institutional Knowledge and 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. Due to the importance of these values and as leadership

succession is no longer codified in the Resolution:

The League commends the AC for the following:

- Its efforts this year in electing officers, organizing assistants, and providing mentors, resulting in a smooth transition.
- Its organization of next year's process of succession.
- *The League strongly recommends* that the AC memorialize in writing institutional knowledge from year to year, including leadership transition and other practices and procedures.

Policies and Procedures

There were no proposed amendments to the Resolution under consideration this year.

- *The League continues to recommend* that the AC monitor the impact of last year's Resolution amendments on the ongoing work of the SBNC.

Further, as in prior years, the *League continues to recommend that the AC:*

- Consider creating a written conflict of interest policy or publishing any written conflict of interest guidelines that may already exist to preserve the legitimacy of the nonpartisan process.
- Consider whether appointed members (TVCC, SNAP, and at-large appointees) should have more defined roles.

Recruitment and Publicity

Candidate recruitment efforts began in early September, with contact to potential candidates and proceeded more formally towards the end of September, with the first major publicity efforts. As indicated in the information session, all candidates for the SBNC were recruited via personal outreach. The AC undertook efforts to recruit through local news media, PTA publications, neighborhood associations, former SBNC members, and social media. Further, the AC acknowledged the substantial assistance from SNAP presidents aided in the outcome.

Additionally, the AC stated in the information report, SBNC website traffic was significantly higher than it was the year before.

The League commends the AC for the following:

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

- Reaching out to former SBNC members for prospective candidates.
- Maintaining, reviewing, and updating the recorded list of persons contacted to run for the SBNC.

As stated in the information report, the goal of the AC was to have a full slate of candidates for each neighborhood.¹ The League appreciates the AC's extensive efforts which led to competitive elections in four out of five elementary school districts. As indicated in the information session, anecdotal evidence suggests challenges for recruitment include many of the same reasons noted in previous years, such as reluctance to run in a contested election against neighbors and the timing of the SBNC meetings on Sunday afternoons, in addition to novel constraints posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

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 affirms that the goal should remain.²

- The *League continues to strongly encourage* that the AC maintain the goal of contested elections in order to provide voter choice and ensure a democratic process in the SBNC election, a process wherein nonpartisan Nominating Committee members are elected by the voters.

The *League continues to recommend that the AC:*

- Consider expanding outreach to the broader community of residents, beyond parents of the school-aged population.
- Ensure accurate and timely website updates during all phases of the election process, especially with regard to election results. The website is vital for recruitment, voter education and fundraising purposes.

Voting Procedures

As indicated in the information session, the AC chose to mail a postcard rather than an election brochure and conducted the election by mail-in ballot only due to the pandemic-induced NYS restrictions on in-person gatherings. The League understands the financial constraints faced by the AC in publishing information on candidates to the public and appreciates the effort undertaken to provide the mailer, as well as mail-in ballots at locations throughout the Village, including the Library 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 information accessible to the public in multiple formats.

¹ [2021 SBNC Report to LWVS](#)

² From the [2020 LWVS Consensus Statement](#)

This year, due to the two-week break in the *Scarsdale Inquirer* publications, the AC paid for an ad with a detachable mail-in ballot on January 8th to remind and inform voters of the January 12th mail-in ballot only election. The League acknowledges the time, effort, and financial costs related to this strategic endeavor to increase voter turnout.

Despite the mail-in ballot only election due to the pandemic, voter turnout was comparable to years with high turnouts as 630 votes cast, 75 rejected, and 555 votes counted, a significant increase from the in-person and mail-in ballot voting in 2020 with only 137 votes cast. The League acknowledges that voter turnout was higher than the previous year; yet also notes that a high number, approximately 12% of ballots received were invalidated due to i) no valid voter could be identified on the envelope; ii) the envelope was not signed by the voter; or iii) the ballot was marked incorrectly (votes were cast in more than one district or the ballot was signed or otherwise written on by the voter). In addition, an untallied number of ballots were not counted because they were not received in the SBNC’s post office box until after the deadline.

The following table is included as a means of tracking voter turnout trends historically. All information was reported to the League by the AC.

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Edgewood	+(119)	*21 (?)	*25 (?)	96 (?)	+39	*22 (0)	+34 (5)	+50 (17)	58 (6)	101 (?)	65 (?)	92 (?)
Fox Meadow	+(151)	*26 (?)	*38 (?)	+161 (?)	107	+69 (5)	*107 (93)	85 (36)	73 (24)	138 (?)	+84 (?)	+90 (?)
Greenacres	+(149)	*19 (?)	*61 (?)	*46 (?)	+115	*23 (4)	+41 (10)	92 (29)	+49 (6)	76 (?)	103 (?)	69 (?)
Heathcote	*(32)	*37 (?)	+73 (?)	+101 (?)	*20	*30 (4)	73 (21)	85 (19)	+42 (19)	108 (?)	+31 (?)	74 (?)
Quaker Ridge	(104)	*34 (?)	*43 (?)	*56 (?)	+74	*30 (0)	*42 (5)	78 (34)	57 (6)	+105 (?)	98 (?)	91 (?)
TOTAL (mail-in)	(555)	137 (?)	240 (?)	460 (?)	355 (?)	166 (13)	297 (134)	390 (135)	279 (61)	528 (?)	381 (?)	416 (?)

Data in parentheses () indicate the number of mail-in ballots
 * indicates uncontested election
 + indicates fewer than twice the number of candidates for each vacancy

The League recommends that the AC:

- Consider improving instructions on how to fill out the ballot in light of the high number of ballots received that were considered invalid.
- Continue looking at ways to make voting easier in order to expand voter participation.

Finances and Fundraising

As noted in the information session, the reduction in the postage costs from sending a postcard mailer this year were not as significant as the AC expected.

For convenience, below is a chart identifying AC's expense breakdown as reported to the League by the AC for the past six years:

TYPE OF EXPENSE	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Printing (mailer)	\$731	\$839.91	\$1,288.50	\$1,199	\$1,287	\$1,061.62
Postage	\$1,064	\$1,066.97	\$1,038.36	\$976	\$988	\$988.16
P.O. Box Rental	\$114	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$126	\$110
Web hosting	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13
Other	\$252				+\$3	*\$60.68
TOTAL	\$2,047	\$2,037.88	\$2,457.86	\$2,306	\$2,409	\$2,233.46

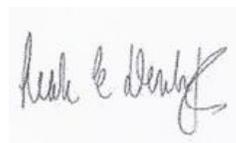
Scarsdale Inquirer ad
+ PayPal transaction fees
* Website domain

- *The League commends* the initiative undertaken and alternatives investigated by the current AC this season to reduce expenses (i.e. having PrintCraft price out route mailing rather than mailing to individual households zoned for Scarsdale Schools).
- *The League recommends* that the AC consider undertaking a cost-benefit analysis related to the implemented changes.

When operating at a fully-functional level, the League views the SBNC election as an outstanding example of civic participation. 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 your work in your capacity as a volunteer.



Jyoti Ruta
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