



February 14, 2022

Ms. Laura Liu, Election Chair  
Ms. Laura Gelblum, Election Vice-Chair  
School Board Nominating Committee Administrative Committee  
PO Box 172H  
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Sent via email to: sbncelection@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Liu & Ms. Gelbum

The League of Women Voters (“League”) thanks you for your presentation at our January 21, 2022 membership meeting to review the January 11, 2022 School Board Nominating Committee (“SBNC”) election. We commend you for your service as Election Chair and Election Vice-Chair of the Administrative Committee (“AC”). We also commend you for the report prepared for our membership meeting and your thoughtful responses to the questions presented at the question and answer session. The League appreciates your time and effort in walking us through your decision-making process and rationale for the outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The League commends the dedication, commitment, and hard work of members of the AC in recruiting candidates and running the SBNC election in-person amidst the evolving public health guidance and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 democratic 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**

The 2020 Resolution changes effectively doubled the size of the AC and provided a larger volunteer workforce than had existed previously. As stated in the information session, there were also more participating members this year than last year (22 participating members as opposed to 20 participating members), and broad member participation aided in candidate recruitment.

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<sup>1</sup> Election Chair’s statements during the [1-21-22 LWVS Info Session re SBNC Election](#).

## **Institutional Knowledge and Leadership Transition**

The League strongly values continuity and the preservation of institutional knowledge. Succession of leadership roles is a key method to ensure such matters are retained within an organization.

*The League commends* the AC for:

- Its efforts this year in electing officers and organizing mentors, resulting in a smooth transition.
- Its organization of next year's process of succession.

*The League continues to recommend* that the AC memorialize in writing institutional knowledge from year to year, including leadership transition and other practices and procedures. We *encourage* the AC to continue to update and consult the election day checklist during each election cycle.

As stated in the information session, transition efforts this year were aided by last year's AC Election Chair taking on the position of AC Secretary and AC veterans supporting<sup>2</sup> the new AC throughout the season. The League is concerned that these fortunate circumstances may not be available to future ACs, and since leadership succession is no longer codified in the Resolution, the League asks the AC to reconsider including leadership succession language in the Resolution for the sake of preservation and continuity of knowledge.

## **Policies and Procedures**

There were eight (8) proposed amendments to the Resolution this year. The amendments had varying levels of support as noted in the table below:

Amendment	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	95%	5%
2	97%	3%
3	88%	12%
4	83%	17%
5	86%	14%
6	90%	10%
7	93%	7%
8	74%	26%

<sup>2</sup> Election Chair's statements during the [1-21-22 LWVS Info Session re SBNC Election](#).

The League's prior Resolution Consensus Statement supported a majority of the amendments. However, the League neither supported nor opposed Amendments #3 and #4.<sup>3</sup> As stated in the information session, the AC acknowledges that there needs to be a mechanism to monitor the efficacy and ramifications of these amendments on the SBNC going forward. Further, the AC acknowledges that this is a priority given the nature of the amendments on the Board of Education candidate recruitment process.

Therefore, *the League supports and encourages* incoming AC leadership to obtain feedback from the SBNC in order to assess and document the impact of this year's Resolution amendments on the ongoing work of the SBNC every cycle. Further, *the League suggests* that particular attention be paid to the analysis of the Resolution amendments that did not garner over 90% of the vote.

## **Recruitment**

As indicated in the information session, candidate recruitment efforts began in late August through personal outreach and went into full swing in late September after the CNC concluded its recruitment process. The AC undertook efforts to recruit through local news media, PTA publications, neighborhood associations, social media, and personal outreach. Further, the AC acknowledged that approximately three to five candidates stepped forward through general publicity efforts and others came forward through the work of neighborhood associations and personal outreach.

*The League commends the AC for the following:*

- Using social media as a tool for recruiting.
- Maintaining, reviewing, and updating the recorded list of persons contacted to run for the SBNC.
- Personal outreach.

*The League continues to suggest* that the AC make a concerted effort to reach out to people without school-aged children, including local civic organizations that have multi-generational membership.

As stated in the information report, the goal of the AC was to have contested elections in each neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> The League appreciates the AC's extensive efforts which led to fully contested elections (i.e., two or more candidates per vacancy) in two of five elementary school districts, partially contested elections (i.e., fewer than two candidates per vacancy) in two of five elementary school districts, and an uncontested election in one elementary school district. As indicated in the information session, anecdotal evidence suggests challenges for recruitment

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<sup>3</sup> [2021 SBNC Resolution Amendment Consensus Statement \(12/21/21\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> [2022 SBNC Report to LWVS](#).

include many of the same reasons noted in previous years, such as reluctance to run in a contested election against neighbors, the timing of the SBNC meetings on Sunday afternoons, and a desire to serve just the remaining term created by a mid-term vacancy.

*The League suggests* that the AC consider boosting education efforts to increase candidate participation.

*The League continues to strongly encourage* that the AC maintain the goal of fully contested elections (i.e., two or more candidates per vacancy) 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 ideal goal of a fully contested election so as to provide voters with at least two candidates for each vacancy has been the central democratic 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 this aspirational goal should remain.<sup>5</sup> We look forward to seeing how greater resident participation as now permitted by Resolution Amendment #8, which allows non-citizen residents to run for the SBNC, affects candidate recruitment efforts.

### **Website**

The AC stated in the information report that the website has undergone “many improvements” to make it “more engaging, informative and easy to navigate.” Since the start of the pandemic, the Scarsdale community has increasingly relied on online methods of obtaining information. This trend will likely continue in the future. Given this, the League is concerned about the timeliness of posted information, missing information referenced in publications, and ease of navigation.

*The League suggests that the AC:*

- Include the webmaster in publicity discussions in order to facilitate an accurate, up-to-date SBNC website.
- Ensure that the SBNC website is at the top of the information dissemination hierarchy.
- Provide and maintain pertinent information in a timely manner on the home page during the entire election cycle to ensure ease of access and avoid navigation issues. Pertinent information includes, but is not limited to, candidate recruitment forms, candidates announcements, proposed Resolution amendments, election day announcements, election results, Resolution voting results, and updated Resolutions post-vote.

*The League continues to recommend that the AC* ensure accurate and timely website updates during all phases of the election process, especially with regard to proposed Resolution amendments and election results. The website is vital for recruitment, voter education and fundraising purposes.

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<sup>5</sup> [2021 SBNC Election Consensus Statement](#).

## Publicity and Election

As indicated in the information session, the AC chose to mail a postcard announcement and conducted the election in person and by mail-in ballot. 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. Further, the League acknowledges the AC's efforts in increasing voter turnout by publicizing same-day mail-in ballot voting procedures available at the The Golden Horseshoe Shopping Center post office location via PTA e-blasts to families with school-age children. 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 and that proposed Resolution amendment information be made accessible to the public in multiple formats.

*The League recommends that the AC:*

- Publicize voting day mail-in ballot procedures to the entire community through multiple formats.
- Include all relevant voting information (candidates and Resolution amendments) on the postcard mailer.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, voter turnout was comparable to high turnout years with 456 votes cast, 8 rejected, and 448 votes counted. The League acknowledges that this year's voter turnout was lower than the previous year; yet also notes that approximately 10% of mail-in ballots received were invalidated due to either no valid voter identifiable on the envelope; or the envelope was not signed by the voter.

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

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Edgewood	+130 (22)	+(119)	*21 (?)	*25 (?)	96 (?)	+39 (?)	*22 (0)	+34 (5)	+50 (17)	58 (6)	101 (?)	65 (?)	92 (?)
Fox Meadow	103 (17)	+(151)	*26 (?)	*38 (?)	+161 (?)	107 (?)	+69 (5)	*107 (93)	85 (36)	73 (24)	138 (?)	+84 (?)	+90 (?)
Greenacres	+83 (4)	+(149)	*19 (?)	*61 (?)	*46 (?)	+115 (?)	*23 (4)	+41 (10)	92 (29)	+49 (6)	76 (?)	103 (?)	69 (?)
Heathcote	*31 (5)	*(32)	*37 (?)	+73 (?)	+101 (?)	*20 (?)	*30 (4)	73 (21)	85 (19)	+42 (19)	108 (?)	+31 (?)	74 (?)
Quaker Ridge	101 (21)	(104)	*34 (?)	*43 (?)	*56 (?)	+74 (?)	*30 (0)	*42 (5)	78 (34)	57 (6)	+105 (?)	98 (?)	91 (?)
<b>TOTAL (mail-in)</b>	<b>448 (69)</b>	<b>(555)</b>	<b>137 (?)</b>	<b>240 (?)</b>	<b>460 (?)</b>	<b>355 (?)</b>	<b>166 (13)</b>	<b>297 (134)</b>	<b>390 (135)</b>	<b>279 (61)</b>	<b>528 (?)</b>	<b>381 (?)</b>	<b>416 (?)</b>

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 strongly supports* measures which make voting easier and offer more choices in the methods on how, where and when to vote. *The League therefore suggests* that the AC consider the following:

- Provide a dropbox at the in-person voting site to accept absentee ballots
- Investigate and explore online voting platform options

**Finances and Fundraising**

We recognize that the SBNC does not receive taxpayer funding and is a not-for-profit organization, a 501(c)4 entity that relies solely on non-tax deductible donations to fund itself.

As noted in the information session, the printing costs increased by 11%, postage costs increased by 6%, and P.O. Box rental fees increased by approximately 11%, Year-over-year costs (excluding the Other item in 2021) increased by 8%, outpacing the inflation rate of 7%. For convenience, below is a chart identifying AC’s expense breakdown as reported to the League by the AC for the past seven years:

TYPE OF EXPENSE	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Printing (mailer)	\$812	\$731	\$839.91	\$1,288.50	\$1,199	\$1,287	\$1,061.62
Postage	\$1,131	\$1,064	\$1,066.97	\$1,038.36	\$976	\$988	\$988.16
P.O. Box Rental	\$126	\$114	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$126	\$110
Web hosting	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13
Other		\$252				+\$3	*\$60.68
TOTAL	\$2,082	\$2,047	\$2,037.88	\$2,457.86	\$2,306	\$2,409	\$2,233.46

# Scarsdale Inquirer ad  
 + PayPal transaction fees  
 \* Website domain

When operating at a fully-functional level, the League views the SBNC election as an outstanding example of civic participation. The League believes that greater efforts to timely educate, inform in a timely manner, and implement mechanisms to increase voter participation would enhance the nonpartisan School Election System. 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. We thank you for your volunteer service.



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 League of Women Voters of Scarsdale



Alissa Baum  
 President  
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