



February 15, 2019

Ms. Wendy Gendel, Chair  
SBNC Administrative Committee  
P. O. Box 172H  
Scarsdale, NY 10583

also sent via email to: wendykgendel@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Gendel,

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (“League”) thanks you for your presentation at our membership meeting on January 28<sup>th</sup> to review the School Board Nominating Committee (“SBNC”) election that took place on January 8<sup>th</sup>. We thank you for your service, and in particular voluntarily extending your multi-year commitment.

The League has a longstanding position of support for the existence of a non-partisan system in the election of Scarsdale’s school board trustees. 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 Non-Partisan Election System. Through its study and evaluation of the process, the League provides independent review and recommendations. We regret that this year we were unable to study and evaluate the SBNC election to the same extent as in years past due to gaps in information traditionally provided by the Administrative Committee (“AC”) in advance of, or at the time of, our general membership meeting. Immediately following our general membership meeting, the League held a consensus meeting of its members to discuss the SBNC election and to review its prior positions pertaining to the SBNC election.

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 already in place.

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

The League commends you for starting the process of SBNC Resolution review by marking up the document and encourages you to press for the Joint Committee’s (“JC”) prompt review of the SBNC Resolution so that it has sufficient time to consider amendments and take action to fulfill the requirements for presenting such amendments for public vote.

In addition, due to prior years’ events, *the League continues to recommend the following be considered:*

- Creating a written Conflict of Interest Policy or publishing any written conflict of interest provisions that may already exist to preserve the legitimacy of the non-partisan process.
- Developing and distributing a Communications Policy for guidance of SBNC, AC & JC members to support the non-partisan process; specifically regarding individual public positions by those on SBNC, AC, or JC in opposition to those nominated democratically by the SBNC.
- Considering whether appointed members (i.e. TVCC, SNAP, and at-large appointees) should have a more defined role.

## **RECRUITMENT AND PUBLICITY**

The League appreciates that this year's candidate recruitment efforts were particularly arduous due to the need to fill several additional unanticipated SBNC vacancies beyond the ten annual seats. The SBNC Resolution requires at least two candidates per vacancy to allow for a local contested election and to ensure a democratic process. We acknowledge the AC decided to increase the number of SBNC candidates, even at the expense of the AC & JC's member composition. Additionally, we commend the quick reaction to supply an additional candidate after the application deadline expired and the election brochure was sent for printing. These decisions made to fill SBNC candidate positions in reaction to late and unforeseen resignations adhere to the spirit, though not the requirements, of the SBNC Resolution. However, the League is concerned by the lack of contested elections in all five neighborhood election districts as being inconsistent with the requirements set forth in the SBNC Resolution. The League strongly recommends that efforts be made to clarify and codify procedures regarding AC and JC leadership transition in order to strengthen the overall democratic process and integrity of the SBNC.

According to the report at the information session, this year's recruitment efforts were significantly more difficult. Possible anecdotal reasons given include: ambivalence stemming from the previous year's decision not to re-nominate an eligible current Board of Education member and her successful run against the slate nominee, community members' unwillingness to run in a contested election, and the five year volunteer commitment. In light of the reported increased difficulty of recruitment, the League suggests review of previously recommended practices as a reminder of considerations moving forward.

*Included in prior recommended practices are the following:*

- Reviewing the appointment process internally with regard to the three member-at-large positions, as well as clarifying the number and length of terms of the SNAP and TVCC appointees with those organizations to ensure that all their vacancies are filled. The League recognizes that the purpose of having these staggered multi-year term appointed members to the AC and JC was intended by the SBNC Resolution to best use community members' insight and institutional knowledge in the recruitment of candidates for SBNC, as well as to diversify the selection of SBNC candidates.

- Developing the use of social media as a tool for recruiting potential SBNC candidates, for example, by posting to local Facebook pages or Twitter feeds.
- Ensuring that a member is dedicated to timely website updates, and increasing promotion of the website by including URL links on other printed brochures and publicity to strengthen use of the SBNC website as a method of communication and information for the general Scarsdale community, especially given the positive increase in the number of users. The website use is vital for:
  - Residents to support the SBNC process, candidates, and voting; and
  - Potential SBNC candidates for information regarding the recruitment process, application, petition materials and deadlines.
- Drafting press releases, and updating the SBNC website “Press” page to include links to the most recent articles and posts about the SBNC.
- Reviewing the recorded list of persons contacted to run for the SBNC for accuracy in light of recent years’ feedback, and updating or deleting names no longer relevant to be considered candidates. Additionally, ensuring updated contacts to the list and their responses to AC solicitations are on a shared live document to keep all members updated as new information is received.
- Reaching out to residents in Scarsdale who do not yet, 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 the SBNC had contacted in the past but not in recent years, for SBNC awareness and candidate recruitment.
- Creating an email distribution list to be used for SBNC candidate recruitment, get-out-the-vote, and fundraising efforts. In addition, including features to the SBNC website to allow people to opt-in to this email distribution list, and publicizing the existence of the opt-in feature.

Additionally, as personal contact is the most effective tool for recruitment, the League recommends the AC strengthen its outreach via in-person attendance and announcements early on in the fall season at meetings of organizations (e.g., individual Neighborhood Associations, LWVS, PTAs/PTC) as well as expand its use of social media groups.

The League acknowledges the AC’s use of PTA/PTC and other community organizations’ newsletters and bulletins leading up to the election to make announcements about SBNC recruitment and voting. The League also commends the AC’s promotion of service on the SBNC as a honor/privilege and the responsibility of every eligible community member.

## **VOTING PROCEDURES**

Although not applicable to this election due to the lack of contested spots, because of events occurring in prior SBNC elections, *the League continues to recommend 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 counting 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, the League acknowledges the AC for the following:*

- Using clear signage in this year's election: "Vote Here" and "Voter Parking" signs were well placed.
- Notifying Greenacres neighborhood voters at the polls of the additional candidate and making the candidate's biographical information available there for review.
- Reviewing the mail-in ballot document to increase voter compliance by clarifying instructions on the face of the document and the mail-in ballot instructions.

## **FUNDRAISING**

Unfortunately, at the time of the consensus meeting, the League had not been provided information with which to evaluate the AC's fundraising efforts or its financial health. However, in light of the report at the information session that the AC's financial condition was dire and the League's observation that some fundraising practices undertaken by the AC in prior years of study had been discontinued, *the League recommends the AC consider the following:*

- Strengthening fundraising efforts to ensure that coffers are replenished in time for next year's efforts, such as with the re-instituted availability of donation cards at the polls, making online appeals via the SBNC website and in press releases to the local newspaper, utilizing known contacts to generate an appeal via email, and extending such solicitations to local social media outlets.
- Creating an email distribution list for informational emails and fundraising solicitations.
- Designating a specific AC member to oversee fundraising efforts and to increase its donor base.
- Keeping records of donors, reinstating the practice of sending thank-you notes to every donor, and asking donors to contribute again the following year in order to rebuild a reliable financial base.

## **LEADERSHIP TRANSITION**

In an effort to further strengthen the democratic process of the SBNC, *the League recommends consideration of the following:*

- Creating detailed and updated written records of roles and responsibilities of AC members for use by incoming AC members to help ensure smooth leadership transition, retention of institutional memory and experience, and effective functioning of the AC.
- Compiling annual summaries of actions taken, best practices, issues & concerns from experiences, and election results by neighborhood area (including mail-in ballots).
- Drafting a timeline with major deadlines highlighted and explained, including a checklist of tasks required in connection with aforementioned deadlines, and a job description to guide members of the AC and JC who take on specific tasks included in the checklist.
- Sharing frequently asked questions and answers.
- Recording an accurate budget for SBNC operations, including in-kind donations to accurately reflect costs.
- Creating a generic email address and cloud-based storage site to be used and passed on to the AC chair to facilitate continuity and transfer of institutional knowledge and records.
- Creating a living document with historical references to issues raised and the determination of said issues at the yearly resolution meeting, including the rationale for the determination of the issues.

When operating at a fully functioning level, the League views the SBNC election as an outstanding example of civic participation. The non-partisan process to selection the most qualified school board candidates is an integral part of our community. Traditionally, this letter is copied to the AC's Vice Chair; however, due to this year's unfilled Vice Chair position, we request a copy of this letter be forwarded to each of the members of the AC, as well as to the third-year members of the SBNC. The League thanks you for all of your work in your capacity as a volunteer.

Sincerely,



Elissa Ruback  
Chair, School Election System  
League of Women Voters Scarsdale




Linda Doucette-Ashman & Janice Starr  
Co-Presidents  
League of Women Voters Scarsdale