



March 17, 2014

Ms. Janet Korins, Co-Chair
The Administrative Committee
49 Ogden Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Ms. Jyoti Ruta, Co-Chair
The Administrative Committee
40 Tunstall Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Ms. Korins and Ms. Ruta,

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (the “League”) thanks you for taking the time to attend our membership meeting on January 27th to review the School Board Nominating Committee (“SBNC”) election that took place on January 15th, 2014. We commend you for your thoughtful, detailed report regarding the election, and for reading and addressing prior recommendations of the League, as well as for your outstanding dedication in carrying out your duties this year as Co-Chairs of the Administrative Committee (the “Committee”). We appreciate how you’ve worked to ensure the future viability of the SBNC and thoroughly examined how your procedures can be improved. In addition to the items mentioned throughout this letter, the League commends you for a job well done. We acknowledge this year’s high voter turnout and we are encouraged by the apparent trend of increased voter turnout, and we encourage the committee to continue to find ways to promote higher voter participation.

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

Recommendations

- Continue efforts to inform the general public about the SBNC process, including publicizing the relevance of the public meeting to all citizens, not just SBNC candidates.

- Consult with the Procedure Committee regarding candidate petition validation process and measures taken to review submitted petitions.
- Continue to send the Notice to Vote brochure and, if financially feasible, include a copy of the mail-in-ballot in the brochure.
- Move away from member-financed cost absorption. If possible, establish a dedicated Fundraising Committee and engage in targeted solicitations for funds.
- Secure a location for a snow date contingency.

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 Committee included two appointees from the Scarsdale Forum, three community-at-large members appointed by the Co-Chairs, and two SNAP representatives. The League commends the Co-Chairs for their diligence in getting outside appointees, especially in light of our recommendation last year that the chairs appoint the full slate of three community-at-large members and the two SNAP representatives.

Participation on the Committee by former SBNC members was again 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 the high participation rate at their meetings, which allowed them to achieve required quorums at all meetings, and commends the Co-Chairs for meeting with the outgoing members of the SBNC towards the end of their terms to explain the role of the Administrative Committee, and recommends that this practice continue in the future.

Continuity of Leadership

The League notes that there is expected to be a smooth leadership transition this year due to the extensive efforts of Committee Co-Chairs to transfer records and written procedures electronically to next year's Committee as well as to retain the Committee's files through utilization of Dropbox.

Candidate Recruitment

The League commends the Committee for its persistence and efforts in recruiting candidates, and for its recognition and thoughtfulness regarding the importance of balance in its candidate recruitment efforts. Committee members spoke at all the September/October PTA meetings encouraging residents to consider running, spoke individually with each PTA president and the SNAP president, utilized all relevant media to publicize recruitment, and, most importantly, engaged in significant personal outreach. The Committee met in person and by conference call to review names of potential candidates, including those who expressed interest last year. The Co-Chairs maintained a spreadsheet to track contacts and provided the Committee with frequent updates by email of the names of candidates and potential candidates.

The League also notes that the final slate consisted of a full slate (4 or 5 candidates) in 4 districts and 3 candidates in the fifth district, with two candidates withdrawing their candidacies after the deadline. Those two candidates were replaced with new candidates using the appointment power under Article IIC3(c) of the Resolution. The League commends the Committee on the number of candidates recruited and that there was a full slate in four out of five districts and a contested election.

The Committee raised the issue of petition validations and the lack of firm process regarding oversight. The League recommends that the Procedure Committee be consulted regarding the petition validation process and potential measures taken to review submitted petitions. The League suggests that a checkbox be included next to petition signatories for “US Citizen” to assist candidates with signatory eligibility/petition compliance purposes and to avoid inadvertent candidate disqualification.

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 amendment, election-day details, and election results in print and online media outlets, through PTA e-blasts, e-blasts from other community organizations, and its own website. The League commends the SBNC for being thorough and utilizing all outlets available for publicity, and for being timely with its publicity.

The Committee held a public meeting that was attended by 13 potential candidates, and the meeting served as an opportunity to educate the candidates on the election process and responsibilities of those elected to the SBNC. The League commends the SBNC for holding this public meeting and getting candidates to attend. The League recommends that the SBNC reach out to the general public to encourage their attendance at this meeting in order to familiarize the public with the process.

In the Notice to Vote brochure distributed to every Scarsdale household, the Committee described the non-partisan process and presented the candidates' biographies and the proposed Resolution amendment. The League notes that the brochure is an important tool for voters and recommends continued use of the written brochure as well as electronic communication. The League commends the Committee on the clarity of the written brochure and the bold large print used to assist reader navigation. The League also recommends that the Committee include a copy of the mail-in ballot in the brochure, recognizing it serves both an educational and convenience function, while also recognizing that fundraising issues may limit the ability to do so.

The Committee also continued to host an informative SBNC website, which you indicated received 4,000 hits in the past year, a 33% increase over the previous year. The League commends the SBNC for the detailed information available on the website and the website's ease of navigation and clarity, and for providing a graphic image on the website of the mail-in ballot envelope requirements (front and back). The League also commends the SBNC on its community outreach via its website and recommends that important dates such as meeting dates continue to be included on the website calendar.

The Vote

Voter Turnout

This year, 525 people voted in the SBNC election, representing an increase of 54 percent over last year's election, although the League understands that last year's turnout was impacted 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 SBNC on this voter turnout and is encouraged by the trend of increasing turnout.

Mail-in Ballots

Approximately 26 percent of votes in this year's SBNC election were cast by mail-in ballot, up from approximately 18 percent last year. The number of disqualified ballots was low, due in part to the graphic representation of mail-in ballot procedures on the SBNC website. As mentioned above, the League suggests that, if possible, the Committee include a copy of the mail-in ballot in the Notice to Vote brochure sent to all Scarsdale households.

Election Date, Signage, Hours, and Parking

The League commends the Committee for polling day management including continuing to partner the election with a joint PTA/PTC meeting at the Middle School, as well as providing "vote here today" signage and voter parking signs.

The League recommends that the SBNC secure a location in the event of a snow day on the scheduled election date, and also recommends that the Committee consult with Assistant Superintendent Linda Purvis about fire code requirements in connection with permissible SMS lobby space usage for tables, etc. on Election Day.

Fundraising

The League notes that the Committee had sufficient funds to administer for this year's election. The League acknowledges the difficulties of raising money for the SBNC election from the general public, and commends the Committee for incorporating appeals for funds into everything that it does that touches the public. The League also commends the Committee for facilitating donations by using PayPal, and for creating a fundraising card with a QR code. As we have recommended in the past, the League recommends that a dedicated fundraising committee be established, and also that the Committee engage in targeted mailings for donations, as has been done in the past. The League also notes that, as in the past, 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,

Tracy Jaffe
Chair, School Election System
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

Susie Rush
President
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

Cc: Bennett Josselsohn, Co-Vice Chair, The Administrative Committee
Mindy Tucker, Co-Vice Chair, The Administrative Committee