

History of Scarsdale's Non-Partisan System

In 1911, after a particularly bitter campaign and election for Town Supervisor, the leaders of the Scarsdale Town Republican and Democratic Party committees agreed to choose a single candidate for any open town government position who would best serve the interests of the entire Village and whom both parties would endorse. The Party committees believed the new bi-partisan system would prevent divisive elections and, because candidates would no longer need to campaign and compete in public elections, result in more citizens willing to serve.

This system worked fairly well until 1930 when the Party committees were unable to agree on a single candidate for an open Village Trustee position. To solve the problem, the Party committees and the Scarsdale Town Club agreed to form a new committee, unaffiliated with either Party, "consisting of representative citizens . . . to select candidates", and the Scarsdale non-partisan election system was born. That fall the Scarsdale Town Club and the Woman's Club co-drafted the first version of the Non-Partisan Resolution ("NPR"), a document that outlines the consensus method to be followed in nominating Village officials. The original NPR was adopted on December 11, 1930 and, as a living document, has been amended 40 times to date.

The major changes to Scarsdale's non-partisan election system since its inception include:

- Replacing polling places in each election unit with one central polling place (1988);
- Redrawing the election unit lines according to the elementary school district boundaries (1980s);
- Providing for a public procedure for amending the NPR (1991);
- Providing for and designing procedures for mail-in ballots (2009-2010);
- The School Board Nominating Committee formally separated from both the Town & Village Civic Club (TVCC) and the Citizen's Nominating Committee (1996);
- The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (LWVS) stopped appointing members to the Citizens Nominating Committee (1969), the Procedure Committee (1982) and the School Board Administrative Committee (1982);
- Potential nominees for Village office considered by the CNC must be notified and confirm by signature their agreement to be considered and to submit the biographical information considered by the CNC (1990s);
- Nominees for village and town offices are given the opportunity to make an oral presentation to the CNC members relating to the nominee's experience and qualifications for the office but not to any specific issues (1990s); and
- The Procedure Committee actively seeks public funding for the election system; however the TVCC assumes responsibility for any deficit not covered by public financing.