



January 18, 2013

Mr. David Brodsky, Chair
Scarsdale Procedure Committee
PO Box 284
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Mr. Brodsky,

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (the “League”) would like to thank you and Eli Mattioli for attending our membership meeting on December 3, 2012 to review the Citizens Nominating Committee (“CNC”) election that was held on Wednesday, November 14, 2012. The League commends the Chair and Vice Chair of the Procedure Committee (“PC”) for their outstanding leadership and commitment to strengthening Scarsdale’s nonpartisan village election system. Furthermore, Mr. Brodsky and Mr. Mattioli continued to pursue and refine various initiatives that began last year to improve transparency and establish the PC as a more independent operating entity. The following bullets underscore key accomplishments achieved by the PC during the 2012 CNC election:

- Increased awareness and understanding of Scarsdale’s nonpartisan election system through well written articles that appeared in the Scarsdale Inquirer, local online media and the PC website;
- Improved transparency by inviting representatives from the League, the Scarsdale Forum and other community groups to participate in the discussion of possible amendments to the Non-Partisan Resolution (“Resolution”);
- Complied with the Resolution by providing two candidates for each open position in each district;
- Redesigned the PC website (www.scarsdaleprocedurecommittee.org) that was updated frequently and included information about the PC and CNC, all forms, CNC candidate bios, proposed amendments, an explanation of how the PC is financed and links to the Resolution and relevant reports;
- Implemented the mail-in ballot option to improve voter turnout;
- Maintained financial independence by funding PC expenses through public contributions.

Immediately after your presentation, the League held a consensus meeting of its members to discuss the CNC election and to review its prior positions pertaining to the village election system. The League highlights the following recommendations and positions. Detailed comments and observations about the CNC election are included in the body of this letter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The League urges the PC to address its internal membership participation issues by considering teleconferencing options, reducing the number of meetings (this year the committee met 7 times compared to 5 meetings in the prior year) and proposing possible amendments to the Resolution that would remove and/or replace members who are chronically absent from meetings.
- Although the Resolution requires that the PC only submit its proposed amendments for public study and comment, the League strongly recommends that the PC hold a public meeting in early September, sponsored by the PC and independent of any other local group or entity, to explain the proposed amendments, encourage discussion and solicit feedback from the community at large.
- The League recommends that the PC continue publicizing the availability of and procedure by which residents can use mail-in ballots. Furthermore, we urge the PC to collaborate and share information with the SBNC about mail-in balloting in order to refine the process and create continuity between the two election systems.
- The League recommends that the PC require that residents using the mail-in ballot sign the seal of the envelope because it follows a procedure that is practiced in all general elections to guard against voter fraud.

The League also reiterates the following two other positions that were put forward in its 2011 “Statement Concerning Scarsdale’s Nonpartisan System For The Selection of Candidates For Village Office”:

1. **The League recommends that the PC propose an amendment to the Non-Partisan Resolution providing that the CNC elect the Chair and Vice-chair of the following year’s CNC from the outgoing class of voting members in order to ensure a more democratic structure.** Currently, the President and the First Vice-president of the TVCC serve as Chair and Vice-chair of the CNC. The League notes that the TVCC is a civic organization whose leadership is NOT elected by Scarsdale residents. Although the Chair and Vice-chair are nonvoting members of the CNC, they are nonetheless in leadership positions and can influence the committee on its operations and selection of candidates. For this reason, it is far more appropriate and democratic for the CNC leadership to be selected by the elected members of the CNC.
2. **The League recommends that the PC propose an amendment to the Resolution to formally codify how the PC and the CNC fund their expenses.** The League commends the PC for including a thorough description on its website and in the election Brochure that explains how the PC and the CNC are financed. However, we restate our position that the PC should formally codify the practice.

DETAILED COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Procedure Committee Member Participation

The League notes that the PC experienced internal problems surrounding participation by its members. Specifically, the Chair reported that four members of the outgoing 2012 CNC class did not attend any PC meetings and one member of the outgoing 2012 CNC class attended only two of the seven meetings. Furthermore, SNAP appointed only one representative instead of the two required by the Resolution so poor attendance not only placed increased pressure and workload on the “working” committee, but also made it difficult to obtain a quorum for voting purposes. The League urges the PC to address attendance issues by considering the following:

- Teleconferencing options;
- Reducing the number of meetings (this year the committee met 7 times compared to 5 meetings in the prior year);
- Proposing possible amendments to the Resolution that would remove and/or replace members who are chronically absent.

Proposed Amendments to the Non-Partisan Resolution

The PC addressed a variety of issues based on feedback that it received from the League, the Forum, prior members of the PC and CNC and the community at large. The League appreciates the opportunity it was given to meet with the PC in the early stages of its deliberations to explain specific recommendations that were made in its 2012 statement concerning “Scarsdale’s Non-Partisan System for the Selection of Candidates for Village Office.”

The League commends the PC for publicizing its proposed amendments in a timely fashion, providing for the requisite 90-day public comment period and for inviting the public to attend a *Scarsdale Forum, Inc.* general membership meeting in October 2012 where the proposed amendments were discussed. The League acknowledges that although the Resolution requires only that the PC submit its proposed amendments for public study and comment, **it strongly recommends that the PC hold a public meeting in early September, sponsored by the PC and independent of any other local group or entity, to explain the proposed amendments, encourage discussion and solicit feedback from the community at large.** The League also suggests that the PC encourage residents to make comments online or via email.

Call for Candidates and The Slate

The League commends the PC for holding its first meeting in May and for initiating the recruitment process for CNC candidates well before the start of summer. Various articles were written and appeared in June and July about the merits of participating in Scarsdale’s nonpartisan system. Furthermore, in August and September, notices appeared in the Scarsdale Inquirer and various online media inviting submission of nominating petitions. The PC maintained a robust website that was frequently updated

and included information about the PC (names of members), the CNC and all requisite forms for potential CNC candidates. The League notes that the Resolution calls for publicizing the names of PC members so that individuals who might be interested in running can contact a member they know in order to obtain more information. Although all PC names were on the PC website, the League recommends that all committee member names also appear in the Scarsdale Inquirer and other media articles.

The League commends the PC for soliciting assistance in identifying candidates from a variety of community organizations. Although the PC ultimately provided a full slate (two candidates for each open position in each district) Mr. Brodsky disclosed that the PC lacked the requisite number of candidates and it had to exercise the appointment process, as authorized by the Resolution. If possible, it would be preferable to fill all the openings prior to the September 30 application deadline with candidates who filed petitions with the requisite number of signatures.

Notice to Vote Brochure

The PC prepared an informative and clear Brochure that contained a thorough explanation of the nonpartisan system, candidate bios, a fundraising solicitation and clear, concise instructions about how to vote and how to utilize the mail-in ballot option. In addition, by using three colors, the brochure effectively highlighted in red “NEW IN 2012: MAIL-IN BALLOT.” The League also believes that it was helpful to include a copy of the mail-in ballot in the brochure, particularly since this was the first year that the mail-in option was available. However, long term, the use of three colors and the inclusion of a mail-in ballot might become cost prohibitive. The League urges the PC to continue evaluating these expenses, especially as our residents become increasingly familiar with the use of the mail-in option and the ability to obtain mail-in ballots on the PC website and at the Public Library and Village Hall.

The Vote and Mail-In Ballots

Unfortunately, this year’s election took place days after Hurricane Sandy and although we will never know for certain, the League assumes that voter turnout was significantly impacted. Many homes in Scarsdale were without power while internet, phone and cable communications were unavailable, making publicity for the election quite difficult. Despite these obstacles, a total of 553 votes were cast and the mail-in ballot option represented 42.31% of those votes – considerably more than in prior years when only absentee voting was permitted. The PC provided voters with a clear, easy to understand candidate ballot and with a second ballot that clearly and accurately presented the proposed amendments.

The League appreciates the efforts of the PC during what was a stressful few weeks for the Scarsdale community. However, since 1998, the tally of votes cast has fluctuated from a low of 353 voters in 2005 to a peak of 664 in 2009 (or approximately 3 to 6 percent of eligible voters). The League strongly recommends the following in order to improve voter turnout:

- Continue community outreach efforts to educate the public about the merits of Scarsdale’s nonpartisan election system.
- Continue publicizing the availability of and procedure by which residents can use mail-in ballots.
- Require that residents using the mail-in ballot sign the seal of the envelope because it follows a procedure that is practiced in all general elections to guard against voter fraud.
- Collaborate and share information with the SBNC about mail-in balloting in order to refine the process and create continuity between the two election systems.
- Consider expanding the polling hours to potentially the full day (7am till 9pm).

Finances

The League commends the PC for including information on its website and in the election Brochure that explains how the PC and the CNC are financed. The League also notes that the PC financed its entire operations through private community donations and commends the PC for soliciting donations on its website and in the Brochure. The Annual Appeal mailing was spearheaded in December and the League looks forward to receiving updated financial information after the fundraising effort has been completed.

Education and Publicity Efforts

The League commends the Chair and Vice-Chair’s extensive efforts to increase awareness and understanding of the nonpartisan system through various articles that explained the nonpartisan election system. The League also commends the PC for making information about all aspects of the election available to the public in the Scarsdale Inquirer, online media and the PC website. We urge the PC to continue utilizing all media outlets and to maintain collaborative working relationships with other community groups, including the school election system committee and neighborhood associations to further develop educational and publicity material about the nonpartisan election system and civic involvement.

Conclusion

The League appreciates the outstanding dedication of the Chair, Vice Chair and each PC member in carrying out their duties this year. The League hopes that the PC will view this letter as a tool to facilitate further discussion about how it can continue to improve Scarsdale’s village election system. We hope that this letter will be shared with the incoming Chair and incoming 2012-2013 PC members. The League congratulates the PC on a successful election.

Sincerely,

Kim Meyers
 Chair, Village Election System
 League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

Marylou Green
 President
 League of Women Voters of Scarsdale