



Scarsdale League of Women Voters

Comments on the Proposed 2012–13 Scarsdale School Budget

April 11, 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (the “League”) supports the Scarsdale School District’s proposed budget (the “budget”) for the 2012 – 2013 school year and recommends that the community vote “yes” to approve the budget on Tuesday, May 15th.
- The League supports the approach that was used by the School District Administration and Board of Education to prepare a 2012–13 school budget with the primary focus on maintaining an excellent school system, while also recognizing the current economic environment which continues to pressure all Scarsdale residents. We encourage the Administration and the Board of Education to continue with this methodology.
- The League commends the district for addressing the need for increased funding for Capital Expenditures and Facilities Maintenance and recommends continued attention to these areas. The League supports the renovation of the high school fitness center, but cannot at this time comment on the refurbishment of the high school auto shop into an internet café due to insufficient information on the total cost to complete the project.
- The League supports the inclusion of 2 unassigned teachers in the budget and urges the Board of Education and District Administration to continue to closely monitor staffing needs district-wide.
- The League strongly recommends that the Board of Education and District Administration re-evaluate, clarify and communicate its methodologies and goals with respect to high school class size and overall student load per teacher in the high school.
- With regard to New York State’s ongoing debate on mandated teacher evaluations, the League recommends that the Board of Education and District Administration continue lobbying efforts to advance the needs of the Scarsdale school district, and to communicate to the public the costs of adhering to such mandates.

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale thanks members of the Board of Education (the “Board”) and District Administration (the “Administration”) for addressing our questions and concerns, as well as for the candor of responses, to a number of items pertaining to the budget, and for attending the League meeting held on March 19, 2012 to discuss the budget.

This statement is based on the League’s subsequent meeting, also held on March 19th, and reflects the consensus of League members on the topics included in this statement.

The 2012–13 proposed budget anticipates a 2.30% total budget growth and overall tax levy growth of 2.89%. The corresponding property tax rate is estimated to increase 3.81% for Scarsdale residents and 2.64% for Mamaroneck Strip residents.

1) The League commends the Board of Education and the Administration for their outreach and outstanding presentations on the proposed 2012–13 budget, both for the League and the entire Scarsdale community. In particular, we acknowledge Assistant Superintendent for Business Linda Purvis for her clear, comprehensive presentation and explanation of the New York State tax cap, the determination of tax rates, and the impact on the Scarsdale school budget.

2) **The League commends the Board for allocating increased funds for Capital Expenditures and Facilities Maintenance.** The 2012–13 proposed budget includes a \$950,000 increase in capital expenditures and facilities maintenance over 2011–12. This is in contrast to budgets for the past 4 years, in which plant improvement expenditures decreased by over a combined \$1,000,000. The League encourages the Board to continue this process of addressing capital expenditures and facilities maintenance needs in accordance with the priorities established by the Administration and the Board. The League would like to comment on the following capital expenditures included in the budget:

- **High School Fitness Center.** The League supports the Board’s decision to renovate the high school fitness center (at a cost of \$350,000 for the 2012–13 school year) for improving the educational environment and opportunities for the students both in their curricular studies and athletic programs.
- **Transformation of the High School Auto Shop into Internet Café.** In light of the shortage of study and collaborative workspace in the high school library and overcrowding in the cafeteria, the League supports the Board’s desires to provide high school students with additional workspace for collaboration and

group learning, as well as more space for students to eat lunch. However, at this time, it is difficult for the League to comment on this project because the district does not have complete information on the scope or total estimated cost of this project. According to the budget, “The plans are in development, and will involve extensive consultation with architects, staff and students.” The budget shows a cost for the renovation of \$300,000 for the 2012–13 school year. If the Board were able to provide more detailed information on projected costs and timing prior to the finalization of the budget, the League may be able to comment on the project at that time.

3) Staffing. The League supports thorough and sustained evaluations of educational programs and teaching assignments in order to ensure the best allocation of the District’s valuable teaching resources. The League emphasizes the need for the Board and Administration to take a hard look at the allocation of teachers across the District, to ensure that their placement allows for the most effective education of our students.

The League acknowledges that the District and the Board must remain flexible in the teacher assignments, and therefore, it supports the Board and Administration’s decision to include 2 unassigned teachers in the budget and to continue to closely monitor staffing needs District-wide.

The League notes that there is no District policy on maximum class size at the middle school or the high school. We understand from the Board and the Administration that the high school administration has over the past 10 years strived to ensure that no more than 12% of classes each year have more than 24 students. **The League strongly recommends that the Board and District Administration re-evaluate, clarify and communicate its methodologies and goals with respect to high school class size and overall student load per teacher.**

4) Teacher Evaluations. The New York State Department of Education is currently reviewing its policy and regulations on Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), which sets guidelines for evaluation of all public school teachers in the State. The new guidelines are not expected to take effect until the 2013–14 school year, and will thus not have a budgetary impact until then.

With regard to the formulation of this policy, the League encourages the Scarsdale School System to continue its lobbying efforts both as a district and with professional organizations outside of Scarsdale to educate our elected officials about the pressing needs of the Scarsdale school district (as well as other school districts) regarding the most effective methodologies and practices for teacher evaluations.

The League shares the Board's and the Administration's concerns regarding the budgetary impact of State-mandated teacher evaluations, as well as currently-existing unfunded mandates by the federal and state governments. The League strongly encourages the District to continue to track and communicate the costs of complying with these mandates to the community.

In conclusion, we thank all of the members of the Board of Education, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Michael McGill and the Administration for the assistance they have provided the League this year in its study of the budget. We hope that you will consider our suggestions and recommendations as you continue to revise and finalize the budget. We look forward to the continuation of the open budget process again next year.

The League recommends that the community vote "yes" to approve the Budget on Tuesday, May 15th.