

December 18, 2009

Mr. Bruce Wells, Chair  
The Procedure Committee  
40 Chase Rd.  
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Bruce,

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (the “League”), itself a nonpartisan organization, favors the concept and recognizes the value of a nonpartisan system for the selection of Village and School Board candidates in Scarsdale. We continue to monitor these election systems to encourage the informed and active participation of our citizens.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with us at our membership meeting on November 24, 2009 to review the recent Citizens Nominating Committee (“CNC”) election. In addition, we appreciate your prompt response to inquiries regarding the election and your detailed report of November 22, 2009 providing your observations of the election process.

The League recognizes the continued efforts by the Procedure Committee (the “Committee”) to administer the election of members to the CNC and its commitment to the effective functioning of Scarsdale’s nonpartisan system. We have several recommendations regarding the 2010 CNC election. Supporting detail may be found in the Detailed Commentary portion of the letter.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. Devise and implement strategies to better educate the community about the nonpartisan system.*** The nonpartisan system is unique, complex and requires an orientation. The League recommends that the Committee identify multiple venues to educate the public. In addition, the committee should reach out to all local organizations in an effort to educate the maximum number of people about the process.
- 2. Improve voter turnout by facilitating voting by citizens.*** The League believes that making voting more convenient for residents would greatly increase voter participation. The League observed the nation’s movement toward early voting in the 2008 general election and would like to harness the momentum in Scarsdale. To this end, the League encourages the Committee to reposition and rename the absentee ballots as mail-in ballots. The League also recommends extending morning voting hours to increase voter turnout.

- 3. Develop policy and procedure guidelines for administering the election.*** The League commends the Chair of the Committee for his dedication in managing the details of the election. Since the election is similar year after year, the League recommends that the Committee develop a set of policy and procedure guidelines that would be used annually. Each step of the process should be documented for future committees. Subcommittees should be set up to handle various aspects including publicity, finances, sending out mailings etc. Among other things, these guidelines should include a timeline that lists the tasks that need to be completed each month. The job of administering the election can be shared with the entire committee. By including the whole Committee in the development of the guidelines and the administration of the election, the process could work more efficiently and each member could add his or her input. Questions that are raised and not covered in the Resolution should be resolved by committee consensus, not solely by the chair.

The League appreciates the Chair's management of the election process and believes the Committee did a responsible job carrying out the administrative tasks. Increasing voter participation continues to represent an enormous challenge. However, an election process that garners the attention of only a tiny fraction of the community needs to be reexamined and thoughtfully modified annually. Below, please find a detailed commentary on all aspects of the 2009 CNC election.

### **Detailed Commentary**

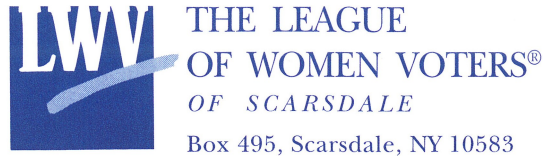
#### ***Overview.***

While the League recognizes that voter turnout this year was on the high side for local Village elections it still represents only a small percentage of the voting population of Scarsdale. Given that the CNC proposes the slate of officials who will, in all likelihood, serve as our Village Trustees and Mayor, those who are entrusted with managing our local budget and quality of life, the League urges the Committee to continue to focus on increasing voter involvement.

The League recognizes that addressing voter apathy is not the specific charter of the Committee, but the League believes that the Committee could take a leadership role in examining new strategies to engage Scarsdale voters and might explore a partnership with the School Board Nominating Committee's Administrative Committee ("Administrative Committee") to tackle these shared issues.

#### ***Nominations.***

Pursuant to the Non-Partisan Resolution, an invitation for submission of nominating petitions should be placed in the official Scarsdale newspaper on two occasions prior to September 30. One notice was placed in the September 11, 2009 issue of the Scarsdale Inquirer. The League suggests that the Committee follows the text of the Non-Partisan Resolution and places a second invitation in the newspaper.



### ***Notice to Vote Brochure.***

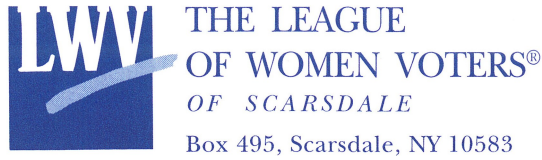
The League commends the Committee for cutting costs by mailing a single page Notice to Vote brochure to residents prior to the election. The League suggests that the Notice be revamped such that the page that is first viewed by recipients (the page with the resident's address) has graphic interest that makes clear that the purpose of the mailing is to notify citizens of the election and to get out the vote. The League recommends that the brochure clarify that each resident can vote only for candidates in his or her elementary school district. In order to condense the size of the Notice to Vote brochure to one page, the information describing the nonpartisan system in Scarsdale was eliminated. While recognizing the need to save money, the League believes that educating the community about the system is of vital importance. The League suggests that the nonpartisan system education portion of the brochure be made available in public venues such as the Scarsdale Public Library and Village Hall. Information should also be placed on the Committee's website.

### ***The Vote.***

*Voter Turnout.* The turnout of 664 voters was an increase in voter participation from 2008's 385 voters but still represents only a small fraction of eligible Scarsdale voters. Since 1998, the tally of votes cast has fluctuated from a low of 353 voters in 2005 to a peak of 664 voters this year. As voter turnout represents approximately 3-6% of resident voters of Scarsdale, the League encourages the Committee to consider a more broad based approach to increasing voter participation. It goes without saying that residents should be informed and active participants in the selection of their governing officials.

An essential first step would be to bolster education efforts. The League continues to encourage the Committee to consider a partnership with the Administrative Committee to develop a comprehensive education effort targeted to the entire Scarsdale population. The League is confident that a task force of Committee and Administrative Committee members could identify and implement a myriad of tailored approaches to reach Scarsdale's different demographics. For example, the League again recommends a representative be sent to the first Parent Teacher Association meeting of each of the Scarsdale schools to describe the nonpartisan system and to generate interest in the election. Although the timing of the Village and School Board elections differs, the fundamentals of the nonpartisan system are the same. A collaborative effort, perhaps in the form of a task force, enables a more leveraged use of scarce volunteer resources. The League also encourages personal outreach to the newer residents of the community will result in a more informed and interested voter base.

The League continues to support the Committee's efforts to rely upon its website to improve voter education and participation. The League commends the Committee for including online the absentee ballot, biographical sketches and the election calendar and believes the website holds even greater potential for voter involvement.

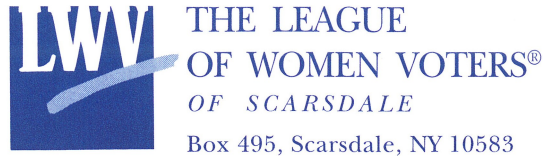


*Voting.* The League was pleased to see the year over year increase in the use of absentee ballots, rising from 17 to 182 individuals. The League appreciates that the Committee made the absentee balloting process easier for voters and allowed for a more generous deadline. The League believes the absentee ballot has enormous untapped potential as an acceptable alternative to in-person voting and could be the vehicle to achieve exponential growth in voter participation. By repositioning and renaming the absentee ballot as a mail-in ballot, the League believes that more citizens would be likely to participate in the election. In order to ensure that the ballot remains a neutral tool for all citizens, the League urges the Committee to carefully educate the community about its intended usage and the benefits thereof in the local media. The distribution of the mail-in ballots should be primarily driven by the Committee and not by the candidates. The League also suggests that these mail-in ballots be made available on the Committee's website and at public sites throughout Scarsdale for those without ready access to the Internet. The League recommends that the Committee remove restrictions on those voting by mail-in ballot (e.g. requiring a signature stating that the voter will be out of town during the election). The League does not believe that a more liberal use of mail-in ballots will compromise the election system. On the contrary, the League believes that greater participation of the electorate results in a more representative government. Of course, the Committee must ensure that the mail-in ballot preserves voting integrity and conforms to the requirements of the Non-Partisan Resolution. Information on the nonpartisan system should also be available wherever ballots are located.

*The Ballot.* The League commends the Committee for providing voters with a clear, color coded and easy to understand ballot.

*Polling Location, Hours, Parking, and Choice of Day.* The League continues to believe that the current polling location at Village Hall is an appropriate venue for the election. The League recommends extending voting hours by a ½ hour until 10 AM. For those voters with children in preschool and elementary school arriving at the polls before 9:30 AM or after 2 PM is often difficult or impossible. Unlike the last several years, "Voters Only" parking was not made available at Village Hall this year. The League urges the Committee to reinstate this dedicated parking to facilitate voting. The League commends the Committee for holding the election on a Tuesday when Scarsdale Village Court is not in session. The League also suggests that the Committee place "Vote Here" signs near the entrances to Village Hall.

*Finances.* For both financial and environmental reasons, the League commends the Committee for decreasing the size of the "Notice to Vote" mailing to the community. The League agrees with the Committee's decision to use a single sheet of paper to post candidate information instead of the proposed postcard mailing. The single 8.5 x 14 inch legal sheet had approximately

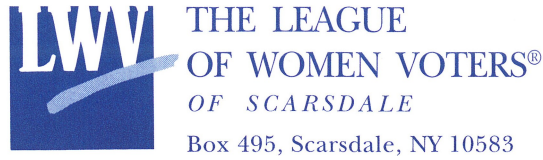


the same cost as the postcard but contained significantly more information. The League also commends the Committee for minimizing costs by providing thorough and up to date information on the election on its website. By using a one-page mailing and excluding the fundraising envelope, the Committee was able to reduce the cost of the election by \$1700. The League supports the Committee's suggestion to explore alternative cost saving methods.

The League notes that the Town and Village Civic Club provided the Committee with \$3000 last year in order to fund this year's election. According to the report from the Chair, the Committee would like to raise \$5000 this year to cover costs and provide a cushion for next year. So far the Committee has raised \$800 of which \$300 was from three neighborhood associations. The League understands the difficulty of fundraising in the current economic environment. The League was pleased to see that the Committee website contains a link to PayPal to facilitate fundraising and that the Committee is about to undertake a fundraising effort with personal letters to members of the community. The League appreciates the Committee Chair providing a financial summary in his report to the League and looks forward to receiving updated financial information in the spring after the fundraising effort has been completed.

**Publicity.** The League commends the Committee for making available to the public information regarding: efforts to attract candidates for the Committee; the proposed candidates; the date, polling time and place for the election; and the procedure for obtaining absentee ballots. The results of the election were also published. It is noted that the coverage appeared in various media, including the Scarsdale Inquirer and on the Committee website. The League suggests that the Committee establish a publicity committee. This group could brainstorm ideas for best communicating with the public and could proactively work with the various media. The Committee could explore a link to the Village website. The League also suggests that the Committee review the video made in the Choice program of the Scarsdale Middle School that explains the nonpartisan system. This video might be another method for educating the public. The League commends the Committee for reaching out to neighborhood associations to identify candidates. The League urges the Committee to reach out to a number of village organizations including the Scarsdale Neighborhood Association Presidents and the Parent Teacher Council to inform and educate the public about the nonpartisan system and the election.

**Number of Candidates per Vacancy.** It is important to note that the Committee, in compliance with the Non-Partisan Resolution, provided at least two candidates for each open position for each district. Given the structure of our nonpartisan system, the importance of the election of CNC members cannot be over-emphasized as the CNC's nominations of Mayor and Trustees are most often tantamount to election. The League recognizes that the Committee expends enormous energies to present voters with a choice for each vacancy and appreciates the Committee's commitment to a contested election.



***Amendment to the Non-Partisan Resolution.*** According to the report of the Committee Chair the Committee is planning to suggest an amendment to Article IV paragraph 4, sentence 2 of the Non-Partisan Resolution. Currently, the sentence reads:

“The mailing to all voters of the notice of the Unit Elections shall set forth a complete list of the candidates together with a biographical sketch of each.”

The new sentence would read:

“ The *delivery* to all voters of the notice of the Unit Elections shall set forth a complete list of the candidates *in their election unit* with a biographical sketch of each *as edited by the Procedure Committee*”

The Committee is proposing three changes to the sentence.

1. The League **supports** the change from “mailing” to “delivery”. In order to reduce the very high cost of mailing to the entire community, the League understands and supports the Committee as it explores more economical ways of delivering information. The League also recognizes that for the foreseeable future, U.S. mail will continue to be the method of delivery as the conduit that can reach the maximum number of community members. For consistency, the League suggests that Article IX, paragraph 4 sentence 2 be changed as well. The word “mailed” should be changed to “delivered”. In this way, both the Notice to Vote and notice of proposed amendments can be delivered in the same way.
2. The League **does not support** the addition of “in their election unit” to the sentence. This change would allow the Committee to deliver to voters a Notice to Vote brochure with information regarding candidates only in a voter’s election district. The League believes that each voter should receive notice of the entire candidate pool.
3. The League **does not support** the addition of “as edited by the Procedure Committee” to the sentence. This change would allow the Committee to edit the biographical sketches of each candidate as it sees fit. The League believes that only the candidates themselves should make these editorial decisions. As per the Non-Partisan Resolution, the Committee is only a conduit for the receipt of the biographical information. The League understands the space constraints that the smaller Notice to Vote brochure presents, and therefore, suggests that the Committee consider limiting the number of characters allowed by each candidate in his or her biographical sketch.

***Conclusion.*** The League appreciates the continued efforts of the Committee to administer the CNC election and lauds its dedication to the nonpartisan system. The League hopes the Committee will view this letter as a tool to facilitate discussion on strategies and tactics to improve the system and would like it to be shared with the incoming chair and his committee. The League understands the financial constraints on the Committee brought on by the difficult economic times and hopes that its cost cutting measures do not impede its ability to include the largest number of community members in the election. The League continues to believe that there is great opportunity to improve voter participation and urges the Committee to take advantage of the nation’s heightened interest in early voting. The League encourages the



Committee to remain committed to the continuous improvement of the Village election system and to an amplified campaign to build awareness among Scarsdale residents. Overall, the League congratulates the Committee on a successful election.

Sincerely,

Ann Sacher  
Chair, Village Election Systems  
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

Jane Veron  
President  
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

cc: Jim Pullman, Vice Chair, Procedure Committee