

Remarks of Trustee David Lee
to the
Scarsdale Citizens Nominating Committee
December 13, 2015

Selecting a Trustee Candidate

I'd like to begin by thanking all of you for serving on this Committee. Our Village relies on this body to do its work thoroughly and choose wisely for the sake of all of Scarsdale, so thank you for your willingness to put in the time and effort to help make the system work well.

In giving you my suggestions as to the qualities to look for in a Trustee candidate, I would divide my suggestions into three categories, each of which relates to a person's effectiveness as a Trustee: 1st) a Trustee's commitment to the demands of being a Trustee; 2nd) a Trustee's role as a decision-maker; and 3rd) a Trustee's relationship to the community and others.

Starting with a Trustee's commitment to the demands of the job, I think you should be looking for

people with a solid record of community involvement because it gives you both some idea of their true commitment to service and how they will likely treat the role of being a Trustee. To give you some idea of what's involved as a Trustee, we hold two board meetings a month and typically meet one or two other nights per month on specific topics, such as land use or financial matters. Those meetings often call for at-home preparation beforehand, reading materials produced for us by Village staff or others. In addition, each Trustee liaises to several other boards or councils and to a couple of neighborhood associations, which could add an additional evening meeting or so per month. So, given these demands, I think that you want to be looking for a person whose track record gives you a sense that they would give to the role the full and conscientious effort it calls for.

Next, regarding a Trustee as a decision-maker:

Here, I am perhaps saying the obvious: it is critical for a Trustee to be both open-minded and fair-minded as to the issues so that he or she will listen carefully to all sides of an issue and, when then weighing the competing interests, arrive at a fair-minded conclusion. Let me go further into this.

Inevitably, a person who's been significantly involved with our community for a number of years comes to a discussion with ideas and opinions of his or her own. But, the hard issues we face as Trustees always have good arguments to be made for each side and generally, whichever way we decide, one set of residents will be benefited while another set will be disadvantaged. A good Trustee can't simply hold tight to his or her going-in position but has to be able to appreciate and weigh the merits of the opposing positions in reaching a decision.

The working out of our annual Village budget, for example, always raises challenging issues. For instance, certain expense portions of the budget are

controlled at the state level and, as such, are beyond our control and increase every year. In addition, salaries for Village personnel, which make up more than half of the expense side of the budget, inevitably rise from time to time. As a result, to cover these expense increases, either we have to raise taxes, dip into our reserves, or reduce expenses elsewhere, which would typically mean either reducing services to our residents or cutting back on or deferring some planned capital projects for the repair of our Village infrastructure - such as our roads, sewers, and public facilities. These budget discussions and decisions don't have room for someone who is dogmatic in their approach and not able to listen well to others and learn from them. An effective Trustee, in my opinion, takes in all sides, and then engages in a careful thought process balancing the merits of each side in arriving at a decision.

But even after doing that, it's likely that one Trustee's balanced decision will not match each other Trustee's balanced decision. That calls for another important quality in a Trustee: a willingness to compromise in trying to reach consensus. This requires a certain sense of practicality as well as a sense of humility, in recognizing that Village business is best accomplished through consensus and that as "right" as you may feel you are, no one person has a lock on all the right answers, especially when it comes to the hard issues. It's certainly fine to advocate for one's firmly held minority view in the face of opposing arguments, but when it's clear that others are not convinced, it's time to compromise, rather than delay the work of the board.

Turning to the last category - a Trustee's relationship to the community and others - brings to mind several qualities to look for.

A Trustee needs to be accessible to our residents. Not many in our community express themselves at Village board or committee meetings or through the media. Trustees therefore need to put themselves out into the community, making it clear that they are interested in resident input, so that community members feel comfortable letting the Trustees know what matters to them.

Also, relating effectively to the community calls for a Trustee to become well informed on community issues and to be able to communicate to our residents what's happening and why. This calls for a person who is willing to commit time toward the learning process and toward meeting with residents, and for a person who has the communication skills to convey the issues to our residents.

I would also suggest in this category of a Trustee's relationship to the community, that it is important for a Trustee to have the strength of

character to maintain his or her objectivity despite having relationships with community members and groups.

Thus, on the one hand, a Trustee should listen to the views of friends and residents, and of neighborhood associations to which he or she is liaises and help them find out answers to their questions. Yet, on the other hand, when deciding how to vote inside the board room, the Trustee's decisions need to be based on what he or she thinks is best for the community as a whole.

We are, after all, Trustees for the whole Village and not champions of the cause for one resident or one group.

A final quality of importance in this category of a Trustee's relationship with the community and others is the ability to treat all people with courtesy and respect. Specifically, this would apply to the treatment of our Village professional staff, fellow board-members, and residents. The Board's decision-making process is hugely dependent upon the input from

our professional staff. The Village staff is first-rate and we interact with them on a regular basis. They work both hard and effectively to provide us the information we need in making our decisions, and a positive working relationship between staff and board would be impeded if respect were not accorded to them.

Similarly, a well-functioning board requires mutual respect and affection among its members. We spend a lot of time together and having fruitful dialogue is made so much easier if we like one another. And, regarding our residents, showing them courtesy and respect when listening to their concerns is certainly the best way to maintain productive communication with them.

So, to sum up, in looking for Trustee candidates, I would suggest looking for people with a record of community involvement, who appear to be open-minded and fair-minded, and yet willing to compromise when necessary in working toward consensus, and looking for people who would make themselves accessible to our

residents and would be good communicators with them, while being able to maintain objectivity when deciding how to vote on Village issues, and, finally, looking for people who get along well with others, which is critical for a well-functioning board and professional Village staff.

Good luck in your work and I hope you enjoy it.