

January 10, 2011

Mr. Jim Pullman, Chair
The Procedure Committee
9 Circle Rd.
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Jim,

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 December 6, 2010 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 December 5, 2010 providing an overview and 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. Some suggestions include partnering with the schools to help teach the system as part of a social studies curriculum, developing materials that could be placed at public locations, placing a description of the nonpartisan process on the Procedure Committee website, and wherever ballots are located.

2. Develop more stringent guidelines for absentee ballots to ensure voter privacy. In order to maintain the integrity of the election, voter privacy must be protected. The League suggests that guidelines be formulated to ensure that completed absentee ballots may not be touched by a candidate or someone working on behalf of the candidate. The League further suggests that candidates should sign a statement on their candidate petition affirming that agreement. The statement should further note that violation of this agreement could result in disqualification from the election. Committee guidance to candidates should indicate whether or not it is ok for candidates to email ballots to people or email a link to the ballot on the Committee's website. The League also suggests that

absentee ballots not be deliverable by hand but solely via the US Postal Service. The postmark deadline should be the day of the election.

3. *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 encourages the Committee to reposition and rename the absentee ballots as “mail-in ballots”. Mail-in ballots would be purely convenience ballots with no attached restrictions. The League also recommends that the polls remain open from 7 AM to 9 PM on the day of the election.

4. *Begin the process of finding nominees earlier in the year.* Since finding candidates to run for the CNC is a long and difficult process, the League suggests that the Committee begin the search in the spring prior to the election. An earlier start date enhances the ability of the Committee to educate and engage more community members in the nonpartisan process and should provide for more candidates.

5. *Consider moving the date of the election back by one week* – Currently the CNC election comes on the heels of the federal general election. The League believes that separating in time the CNC election from the general election will help distinguish the CNC election. The Brochure should still be mailed immediately after the general election.

Should the recommendations made in #2 and #3 above be deemed appropriate, a longer timeline may have the added benefit of allowing more time for voters to get their ballots postmarked by the election deadline.

6. *Develop policy and procedure guidelines for administering the election.* The League commends the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee for their dedication in managing details of the election. We commend the Chair for developing a timeline for the election but suggest that since the election is similar year after year the Committee should 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. 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.

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 2010 CNC election.

Detailed Commentary

Overview.

While the League recognizes that voter turnout this year was fairly consistent with what it has been in the past, it still only represents a small portion 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. The League commends the Committee for placing notices in the Scarsdale Inquirer on Aug. 27 and Sept. 24. The second notice contained an explanation of the nonpartisan system. As mentioned above, the League strongly recommends that the Committee begin its search for candidates in the spring preceding the election to educate more people in the community about the nonpartisan system and the upcoming election, increase the available candidate pool and allow for the earlier preparation of the Brochure. This change could also help improve voter turnout.

Notice to Vote Brochure.

The League commends the Committee for reformatting the Brochure to a slightly larger size and more legible type while still maintaining costs. The League continues to suggest 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 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 about the system should also be placed on the Committee's website in an easily readable form.

The League commends the Chair for sending a pre-election letter to the candidates. The League suggests that this letter also contain information that reinforces the importance of voter privacy as described below.

The Vote.

Voter Turnout. The turnout of 516 voters 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 last 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, which could 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 suggests that information on the nonpartisan system be made available on the website.

The League suggests that the timing of the election be further reviewed. Moving the election one week later in the calendar would separate it further from the general election and allow more time for study of the Brochure by voters. It would also allow more time for the submission of absentee ballots.

Voting. The League notes that approximately one quarter of the votes cast this year were by absentee ballot. While the League believes that the absentee ballot has enormous potential as an acceptable alternative to in-person voting the League also recognizes that this must be balanced with the importance of maintaining election integrity. The League recommends that guidelines for the use of absentee ballots be tightened. We suggest that candidates and those who work with them be forbidden to touch completed ballots. Furthermore candidates should be required to sign a statement stating the same. The statement could be placed on the bottom of the candidate petition form above the signature line. In addition, the League believes that absentee ballots should be delivered exclusively via USPS mail. The deadline for ballot submission should be a

postmark on the day of the election. A short delay in knowing the results of the election would facilitate voter privacy.

The League continues to believe that the absentee ballot 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 suggests that these mail-in ballots be made available 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 believes that greater participation of the electorate results in a more representative government *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 believes that the current polling location at Village Hall is an appropriate venue for the election during school hours. We suggest that the Committee investigate holding nighttime voting at the Scarsdale Middle School to increase voter participation. Perhaps the Committee could coordinate with the PT Council to hold the election on the evening of a joint PTA meeting. This has been a successful strategy for the School Board Nominating Committee as numerous people attend the meeting and vote at the same time. The League commends the Committee for extending election hours to accommodate more voters. The League suggests that hours be extended further so that the polls are open all day from 7 AM to 9 PM. Unlike the last several years, "Voters Only" parking was not made available on the upper level of the Village Hall parking lot this year. For older people or those with babies, climbing the stairs from the lower level could be an impediment. The League urges the Committee to explore reinstating this dedicated parking. The League continues to suggest that the Committee place large, in-ground "Vote Here" signs near both entrances to Village Hall. The League commends the Committee for holding the election on a Tuesday when Scarsdale Village Court is not in session.

Finances. For both financial and environmental reasons, the League commends the Committee for continuing to send the smaller sized Brochure to the community.

The League notes that the Committee was successful in its efforts to fundraise to pay the costs of the elections in the last two years. The League was pleased to see that the Committee website contains a link to PayPal to facilitate fundraising. The League agrees with the Chair that lowering checking account

costs was an area to be investigated for further cost savings. The League also suggests that refreshing the Committee's fundraising mailing list could help with future fundraising efforts. The League appreciates the 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 information available to the public 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, Scarsdale10583.com 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 League commends the Committee for reaching out to neighborhood associations to explain the nonpartisan system and to identify candidates. The League urges the Committee to reach out to a number of village organizations including the Scarsdale Neighborhood Association Presidents and PT 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. The League urges the Committee to enlist members of the current CNC to participate in efforts to identify candidates and replace themselves.

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 her 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 believes that with the appropriate safeguards, election integrity could be preserved while at the same time voter turnout could be expanded with the use of mail-in ballots. 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: Michelle Lichtenberg, Vice Chair, Procedure Committee