

January 27, 2023

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Ms. Susi D'ambra Coplan, SBNC Election Chair
Ms. Claire (Yin) Yang, SBNC Election Vice Chair
School Board Nominating Committee Administrative Committee
P.O. Box 172H
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Sent via email to: sbncelection@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Coplan,
Dear Ms. Yang,

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (“League”) thanks Ms. Coplan for the presentation at our January 20, 2023 membership meeting to review the January 10, 2023 School Board Nominating Committee (“SBNC”) election. We thank Ms. Coplan for her thoughtful responses to the questions presented at the question and answer session. The League appreciates her time and effort in walking us through her decision-making process and rationale for the outcomes.¹ We commend Ms. Coplan for taking on the role of SBNC Election Chair relatively late in the SBNC season in August. We also commend Ms. Coplan and Ms. Claire (Yin) Yang, SBNC Election Vice Chair, for the report prepared for our membership meeting. The League appreciates the dedication, commitment, and hard work of members of the SNBC Administrative Committee (“AC”) in recruiting candidates and running the SBNC election in-person.

The League is invested in its independent oversight role of monitoring the SBNC elections to ensure transparency, organization, and legitimacy of the elections, as those elections are the democratic component of Scarsdale’s nonpartisan election system. Through its study and evaluation of the process,

¹ [Election Chair’s statements during the 1-20-23 LWVS Info Session re SBNC Election.](#)

the League provides independent review and recommendations. The statement below documents the results of the League's consensus meeting immediately following the information session held via Zoom. It serves to highlight recommendations for future SBNC elections and reflect on AC practices currently in place.

Member Participation

As stated in the SBNC AC's report,² all 8 members who completed their 2022 term as voting members of the SBNC joined those continuing their 2-year service on the AC along with 4 SNAP representatives and 2 members-at-large who fully participated.

Institutional Knowledge and Leadership Transition

The League strongly values continuity and the preservation of institutional knowledge. As stated in the information session, the preservation of knowledge is organized through the utilization of electronic and paper files. Further, transition efforts this year were aided by last year's AC Election Chair taking on the position of AC Secretary and AC veterans supporting³ the new AC throughout the season.

The League commends the AC for:

- Its self-improvement efforts, including documenting missteps and revising processes to increase effectiveness
- Planning a post-election debrief meeting to review this year's election and plan for next year's election season including reviewing the potential candidate list

Succession of leadership roles is a key method to ensure knowledge retention within an organization. As stated in the information session, the SBNC Election Chair was elected in August 2022 instead of in the Spring of 2022 and did not have the benefit of a training period. The League recognizes that the SBNC Election Chair is a challenging role and not having enough time to prepare increases the challenge.

² [SBNC AC's written report to LWVS.](#)

³ [Election Chair's statements during the 1-20-23 LWVS Info Session re SBNC Election.](#)

In light of the elimination of the leadership succession plan from the SBNC Resolution several years ago and the comments made by the Election Chair at the League's information session about the potential benefits of having a year to observe and participate in the election before chairing it, the League *suggests* that the AC:

- Continue to assess the need to return to a more formalized leadership transition process (i.e. whereby the Election Vice Chair trains under an Election Chair for a season and then steps into the role of Election Chair the next season)

Recruitment

As indicated in the information report, candidate recruitment efforts began in mid-August through personal outreach and went into full swing in late September. The AC undertook efforts to recruit through local news media, PTA publications, neighborhood associations, social media, and personal outreach.

The League acknowledges the difficulty the AC had in recruiting this season without being able to convey the planned SBNC meeting schedule to prospective SBNC candidates. As indicated in the AC's report, the SBNC was considering changes to the traditional meeting times and dates and had not committed to a schedule in time to be included in the printed community calendar or by the time the AC undertook its recruiting efforts. Prospective SBNC candidates did not have the benefit of knowing the required schedule and time commitment when deciding whether to run. Fortunately, the AC was able to attract candidates who were comfortable not knowing the meeting schedule. The League agrees with the SBNC Election Chair that the SBNC should set times prior to the recruitment season and community calendar input deadlines to provide full information to prospective candidates and fully support robust recruitment.

The League *suggests* that the AC:

- Determine SBNC meeting dates in the spring so they can be included on the printed community calendar and so potential SBNC candidates have an opportunity to assess their availability for service

The League *commends* the AC for:

- Constant open communication with candidates throughout the election cycle, from the recruitment phase through election day

As stated in the information session, the goal of the AC was to have contested elections in each neighborhood.⁴ The League appreciates the AC's extensive efforts which led to fully-contested elections (i.e., two or more candidates per vacancy) in two of five elementary school districts, partially-contested elections (i.e., fewer than two candidates per vacancy) in one of five elementary school districts, and uncontested elections in two of five elementary school districts. As indicated in the information session, two candidates dropped out after the application deadline because of personal reasons. The League is encouraged that candidates were willing to put forth their names and run in contested elections.

*The League continues to strongly encourage the AC to maintain the goal of fully-contested elections (i.e., two or more candidates per vacancy) in order to provide voter choice and ensure a democratic process in the SBNC election, a process wherein nonpartisan Nominating Committee members are elected by the voters. The ideal of a fully-contested election has been the central democratic part of the SBNC process. While there may be individual elections or periods of time when contested elections are not possible, the League affirms that this aspirational goal should remain.*⁵

Website

In light of our recommendation last year to ensure that the SBNC website stays at the top of the information dissemination hierarchy, the League *commends* the AC for ensuring timely updates of all information throughout the election cycle.

The League suggests that the AC:

- Accurately match up the link label to the links to ensure ease of access and avoid navigation issues for potential voters, especially with respect to links to the mail-in ballots and instructions

Publicity and Election

As indicated in the information session, the AC chose to mail a full brochure with candidate biographies and conducted the election in person and by mail-in ballot. As the League supports and promotes informed citizenship, the League would like to emphasize the continued importance of ensuring that full candidate biographical information and any proposed Resolution amendment information be made accessible to the public in multiple formats.

⁴ [Election Chair's statements during the 1-20-23 LWVS Info Session re SBNC Election.](#)

⁵ [2022 SBNC Election Consensus Statement.](#)

The League *commends* the AC for:

- Publicizing the election and mail-in ballot procedures to the entire community through multiple formats including the website
- Mailing a full brochure with the candidate biographies to Scarsdale residents

The League understands the financial constraints faced by the AC in publishing information on candidates to the public and appreciates the effort and increase in cost undertaken to provide the brochure.

As stated in the information session, election day had a steady stream of voters with a few voters commenting on a lack of ‘Election Parking’ signs, color coding of the ballots not matching elementary school colors, and lack of the candidate brochure at the voting site.

The League *suggests* that the AC:

- Review and revise detailed checklists during post-election debrief and pre-election date meetings to ensure the relevant logistics are in place for the current election operating environment (i.e. COVID vs. in-person elections)

Despite the ongoing pandemic, voter turnout was comparable to high turnout years with 501 votes cast, 40 rejected, and 461 votes counted. The League acknowledges that this year’s votes counted was slightly higher (3%) than the previous year and mail-in ballots increased by 237%; yet also notes that approximately 20% of mail-in ballots received by the election day were invalidated due to either no valid voter identifiable on the envelope, the envelope was not signed by the voter, or the name or address did not match any records.

The following table is included as a means of tracking voter turnout trends historically. All information was reported to the League by the AC.

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Edgewood	41 (5)	+130 (22)	+(119)	*21 (?)	*25 (?)	96 (?)	+39 (?)	*22 (0)	+34 (5)	+50 (17)	58 (6)	101 (?)	65 (?)	92 (?)
Fox Meadow	*39 (1)	103 (17)	+(151)	*26 (?)	*38 (?)	+161 (?)	107 (?)	+69 (5)	*107 (93)	85 (36)	73 (24)	138 (?)	+84 (?)	+90 (?)
Greenacres	+115 (44)	+83 (4)	+(149)	*19 (?)	*61 (?)	*46 (?)	+115 (?)	*23 (4)	+41 (10)	92 (29)	+49 (6)	76 (?)	103 (?)	69 (?)
Heathcote	*17 (5)	*31 (5)	*(32)	*37 (?)	+73 (?)	+101 (?)	*20 (?)	*30 (4)	73 (21)	85 (19)	+42 (19)	108 (?)	+31 (?)	74 (?)
Quaker Ridge	85 (109)	101 (21)	(104)	*34 (?)	*43 (?)	*56 (?)	+74 (?)	*30 (0)	*42 (5)	78 (34)	57 (6)	+105 (?)	98 (?)	91 (?)
TOTAL (mail-in)	461 (164)	448 (69)	(555)	137 (?)	240 (?)	460 (?)	355 (?)	166 (13)	297 (134)	390 (135)	279 (61)	528 (?)	381 (?)	416 (?)

Data in parentheses () indicate the number of mail-in ballots
 * indicates uncontested election
 + indicates fewer than twice the number of candidates for each vacancy

The League is encouraged by the trend of increasing turnout. As per the information session, voter turnout was aided by residents attending various PTA meetings at the voting location, the Scarsdale Middle School. The League also appreciates the AC's coordination of its election date and venue with the PTA's program to increase voter turnout.

The League acknowledges the significant increase in mail-in ballots over last year. However, the League is concerned about the large number of invalidated mail-in ballots and that the AC did not check how many additional ballots arrived after the mail-in ballot deadline.

The League *recommends* that the AC:

- Boost education efforts with respect to mail-in ballot instructions
- Ensure that printed mail-in ballots include instructions on how to complete valid mail-in ballots

Finances and Fundraising

We recognize that the SBNC does not receive taxpayer funding and is a not-for-profit organization, a 501(c)4 entity that relies solely on non-tax deductible donations to fund itself.

As noted in the information session, the printing costs (2022 postcard mailer vs. 2023 full mailer) increased by 92% and postage costs increased by 8%. Year-over-year costs increased by 40%, outpacing the inflation rate of 6.5%. For convenience, below is a chart identifying AC's expense breakdown as reported to the League by the AC for the past seven years:

TYPE OF EXPENSE	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Printing (mailer)	\$1,560	^\$812	^\$731	^\$839.91	\$1,288.50	\$1,199	\$1,287	\$1,061.62
Postage	\$1,226	\$1,131	\$1,064	\$1,066.97	\$1,038.36	\$976	\$988	\$988.16
P.O. Box Rental	\$126	\$126	\$114	\$118	\$118	\$118	\$126	\$110
Web hosting	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13	\$13
Other			#\$252				+\$3	*\$60.68
TOTAL	\$2,925	\$2,082	\$2,047	\$2,037.88	\$2,457.86	\$2,306	\$2,409	\$2,233.46

Scarsdale Inquirer ad
 + PayPal transaction fees
 * Website domain
 ^ Postcard mailer

As stated in the information session, the AC currently has a shortfall and is re-doubling efforts to fundraise. The League advises that the AC consider broader promotion of its donation QR code (e.g., the brochure).

When operating at a fully-functional level, the League views the SBNC election as an outstanding example of civic participation. The League believes that greater efforts to boost community education and the implementation of self-improvement mechanisms to eliminate inefficiencies and increase voter participation would enhance the nonpartisan School Election System. Overall, the League congratulates the AC on a successful election.

The League hopes that the AC will view this letter as a tool to facilitate discussion of strategies for continuing to improve the system. The League requests that Ms. Coplan and Ms. Yang disseminate this statement to all members of SBNC and AC. We thank all members of the SBNC and AC for their volunteer service.



Jyoti Ruta
School Election System Portfolio Chair
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale



Alissa Baum
President
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale