

P.O. Box 495
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May 31, 2024

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Mr. Jon Lemle, SBNC Administrative Committee
School Board Nominating Committee Administrative Committee
P.O. Box 172H
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Also sent via email to: sbncelection@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Lemle,

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (League) has a longstanding position of support for the existence of a nonpartisan system in the election of Scarsdale's school board trustees. Through its study and evaluation that traditionally includes the much appreciated participation of members of the School Board Nominating Committee Administrative Committee (SBNC AC), the League makes recommendations annually, in the interest of sustaining and improving the AC's process to ensure transparency, organization, and legitimacy of the SBNC elections that are the democratic component of Scarsdale's nonpartisan school election system. Unfortunately this year, the AC did not attend the League's Information Session despite multiple attempts to secure a mutually convenient meeting date and did not provide response to the League's questions or a written report, as had been the custom.

The statement below documents the results of the League's Consensus Meeting immediately following the Information Session held via Zoom and serves to highlight recommendations for future SBNC elections and reflect on AC practices currently in place. In the absence of the participation of the AC and the lack of response to the League's questions, this statement relies on public sources of information and personal observation of the election process and thus lacks the specificity and robustness of past Consensus Statements.

Member Participation

Due to the absence of information from the AC, the League is unable to comment on member participation rates or roles filled.

Recent SBNC Resolution Changes and Their Impact on Institutional Knowledge and Leadership Transition

The League strongly values continuity and the preservation of institutional knowledge. The League encourages the next AC Chairs and those filling AC leadership positions to consult with prior AC Chairs in order to successfully step into the roles next season and consult checklists and documentation generated in years past.

The League also suggests the AC consider the impact that prior resolution changes may have had on leadership transition and institutional knowledge. For example, the League previously expressed concern with the 2020 amendment that eliminated the succession plan from vice chair to chair.¹ The League reiterated its concern last year, recommending that the AC “[c]ontinue 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).”²

The League also previously expressed reservations with the 2020 amendment that modified the three-year staggered term system as to allow all SBNC voting members to serve a full three-year term regardless of a previous Election Unit vacancy because such a change could create fluctuations in the numbers of individuals rolling off any given year from the SBNC and onto the AC.³ This year’s graduating class of SBNC voting members who rolled onto the AC following their service consisted of fewer than ten people, with disparate representation across neighborhood-based election units.

In addition, the SBNC Election Chair resigned during the course of this election cycle, and there was no clear communication to the public or to the League who would be assuming primary responsibility for running the election.

The League urges the AC to reflect on its experience over the past few years and consider whether to re-codify the leadership succession plan and staggered term system through future amendments to the SBNC Resolution. Independent of potential changes to the SBNC Resolution, the League also strongly recommends the AC

¹ [LWVS 2020 SBNC Resolution Amendment Consensus Statement, p. 4.](#)

² [LWVS 2023 SBNC Election Consensus Statement, p. 3.](#)

³ [LWVS 2020 SBNC Resolution Amendment Consensus Statement, pp. 5-6.](#)

implement a plan for leadership succession that addresses unexpected leadership vacancies, and memorialize in writing all practices and procedures.

Community Outreach/Candidate Recruitment

From League observations of information circulated online, candidate recruitment efforts began in late September. The AC appears to have undertaken efforts to recruit primarily through PTA publications, the SBNC website and social media.

The League commends the AC for reinstituting the practice of finalizing and sharing an SBNC meeting schedule in advance, as suggested during last year's Information Session and Consensus Statement, allowing prospective SBNC candidates to have the benefit of knowing the required schedule and time commitment when assessing their availability for service. Nevertheless, the League continues to suggest that the AC strengthen its efforts for recruitment, including modalities of recruitment. For example, community members without school-aged children will not have seen notices in the PTA publications. Inclusion in SNAP communication, making use of any available Scarsdale-centric communication mechanisms, and outreach via local civic organizations that have multi-generational membership may allow reaching a larger swathe of the community. Especially in the absence of the Scarsdale Inquirer, diversifying recruitment efforts is essential to ensuring adequate outreach.

The League notes that none of the five elementary school neighborhoods had contested elections and that two of the election districts had fewer candidates than open positions (2 candidates running for 4 positions in Heathcote, and 2 candidates running for 3 positions in Quaker Ridge), causing the SBNC to commence its season with fewer than the prescribed number of voting members. As expressed in previous consensus statements, "[t]he 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."⁴

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⁴ [2022 SBNC Election Consensus Statement, p. 4](#) and [2023 SBNC Election Consensus Statement, p. 4](#).

Website

In light of the League's recommendation in last year's consensus statement⁵ 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 information throughout the election cycle. However some instances of contradictory or incorrect information were noted on the website. For example, the website was not updated after the resignation of the Election Chair, some of the information concerning current AC membership was inaccurately carried over from prior years, and delayed updates regarding the weather-related early closure of the polls and rescheduled dates for the election may have caused confusion among potential voters.

The League suggests that the AC place a greater priority on updating and maintaining its website to ensure the SBNC website becomes the first and primary information source for election-related news. In addition, the SBNC's own website and any future SBNC-owned social media should provide pertinent information in a timely manner on the home page during the entire election cycle to ensure ease of access and avoid navigation issues.

Publicity

From observation, publicity for the election was primarily conducted through school PTA communications, which are available only to PTA members and not the general public, though information about the election and the mail-in ballot was eventually posted on the SBNC website. This year, the AC did not mail an election brochure nor a postcard notifying residents of the election. The AC does not appear to have curated an email list for dissemination of information or solicitation of donations nor created any social media accounts. The League suggests the AC mail a full brochure with the candidate biographies to Scarsdale residents. Especially in the absence of the Scarsdale Inquirer, reaching all residents becomes all the more important.

Election

This year's election did not coincide with a speaker event at the Middle School, which typically allows for greater voter turnout. The election was further complicated by a storm that resulted in the AC decision to close the polls early, albeit without a plan to communicate that message to those who may have intended to vote that evening. Likewise, once the decision was made to resume the interrupted election at a new

⁵ [2023 SBNC Election Consensus Statement, p. 4.](#)

location the following week, availability of information concerning that new date and whether mail-in ballots could be submitted up until the second date was lacking.

The League commends the AC for:

- Staffing the election with well-organized volunteers who stayed at the voting site throughout most of the day on January 8, until the decision was made to close the polls early due to weather
- Deciding to resume the interrupted election to provide an opportunity for those who were unable to vote on the original election date
- Coordinating the resumed election polling times and location to coincide with an event at Scarsdale High School that could potentially increase voter turnout
- Rescheduling the resumed election a second time to coincide with the postponed event at Scarsdale High School when the rescheduled election could not proceed as planned due to weather and a District-wide closure of school buildings and activities
- Undertaking fundraising efforts at the election site through the use of a QR code

The League advises the AC to:

- Create and document an inclement weather plan that includes and prioritizes notifying the public of any weather-related changes to voting⁶
- Utilize multiple communication channels to reach as broad a segment of the community as possible, exploring the viability of asking other Scarsdale-based organizations to disseminate information on an emergency basis to their contacts
- Increase signage at and around the polling site
- Clarify and publicize whether mail-in ballots received after the date of the election but before the rescheduled date would be counted
- Consider amending the SBNC Resolution to allow for the use of drop boxes in addition to USPS for collection of the mail-in ballot as a means to increase voter turnout

The League notes a drastic decline in both in person and mail-in ballots this year after several years of increasing voter turnout. The League does not have information on invalidated mail-in ballots, if any. The League recommends that the AC make mail-in ballots available earlier, and boost education efforts with respect to mail-in ballot instructions.

⁶ The League notes that the decision to close the polls early due to adverse weather conditions was not accompanied by a school closure, and, consequently, the AC could not rely on a schoolwide notification to alert those on the District's emergency distribution list of any change to the polling hours.

The League underscores the importance of contested elections to drive voter turnout. The following table is included as a means of tracking voter turnout trends historically. In the absence of receiving this information directly from the AC, this year's data was compiled from the AC's press release which was posted on Scarsdale10583.com and subsequently on the AC's website, though it did not contain mail-in ballot numbers specific to the election units.⁷

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Edgewood	*70 (?)	41 (5)	+130 (22)	+(119)	*21 (?)	*25 (?)	96 (?)	+39 (?)	*22 (0)	+34 (5)	+50 (17)	58 (6)	101 (?)	65 (?)	92 (?)
Fox Meadow	*10 (?)	*39 (1)	103 (17)	+(151)	*26 (?)	*38 (?)	+161 (?)	107 (?)	+69 (5)	*107 (93)	85 (36)	73 (24)	138 (?)	+84 (?)	+90 (?)
Greenacres	*54 (?)	+115 (44)	+83 (4)	+(149)	*19 (?)	*61 (?)	*46 (?)	+115 (?)	*23 (4)	+41 (10)	92 (29)	+49 (6)	76 (?)	103 (?)	69 (?)
Heathcote	*32 (?)	*17 (5)	*31 (5)	*(32)	*37 (?)	+73 (?)	+101 (?)	*20 (?)	*30 (4)	73 (21)	85 (19)	+42 (19)	108 (?)	+31 (?)	74 (?)
Quaker Ridge	*22 (?)	85 (109)	101 (21)	(104)	*34 (?)	*43 (?)	*56 (?)	+74 (?)	*30 (0)	*42 (5)	78 (34)	57 (6)	+105 (?)	98 (?)	91 (?)
TOTAL (mail-in)	147 (42)	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

Finances and Fundraising

In the absence of AC participation, the League does not have sufficient information with which to comment on finances and fundraising this year. As a point of reference for the future, the chart below indicates the information assembled from prior 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

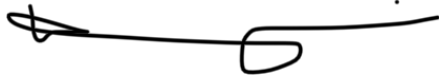
* Website domain

^ Postcard mailer

⁷ [Scarsdale10583.com](https://scarsdale10583.com) and [SBNC website](https://sbnc.org)

Conclusion

The League is optimistic that the difficulties that the AC experienced this year were an anomaly and that next year's AC can restore the practices and cooperation that have enabled the League to undertake its annual study of the school election system. The League views the SBNC election as an outstanding example of civic participation and hopes that the AC will view this letter as a tool to facilitate discussion of strategies for continuing to improve the system. The League thanks all members of the SBNC and AC for their volunteer service and requests that Mr. Lemle disseminate this statement to all members.



Diksha Mudbhary
School Election System Portfolio Chair
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale



Heedan Chung
President
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

Cc: Valerie Phillips, 2024 SBNC Chair; Susi D'ambra Coplan, 2024 SBNC AC Member; David Fenigstein, 2024 SBNC Election Vice Chair; Lisa Gans, 2025 SBNC Chair; Anne Bates, 2025 SBNC Vice-Chair; Jen Zola, 2025 SBNC Vice-Chair