

February 9, 2009

Carolyn Mehta, Chair
The Procedure Committee
12 Rochambeau Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Carolyn:

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale (the "League"), itself a nonpartisan organization, favors the concept of, 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 8, 2008 to review the recent Citizens Nominating Committee (the "Committee") election. In addition, we appreciate your prompt response to inquiries regarding election materials and your letter dated November 24, 2008 providing your observations of the election process.

The League recognizes the continued efforts by the Procedure Committee to administer the election of members to the Committee and its commitment to the effective functioning of Scarsdale's nonpartisan system. We have the following recommendations regarding the upcoming 2009 Committee election:

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 would encourage the Procedure Committee to consider a partnership with the School Board Nominating Committee's Administrative Committee ("Administrative Committee") to develop a comprehensive education effort targeted to the entire Scarsdale population. 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 separate task force, enables a more leveraged use of scarce volunteer resources.
- 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 general election and would like to harness the momentum in Scarsdale. To this end, the League encourages the Procedure Committee to reposition absentee ballots as early voting ballots. The League does not believe that a more liberal use of early voting ballots will compromise the election system. On the contrary, the League believes that more broad based participation of the electorate results in a more representative government.
- 3. Explore more cost effective methods of informing electorate.*** The League reacted favorably to the Procedure Committee chair's suggestion to identify ways to reduce the expense of running the election. Given that the bulk of the cost resides in the mailing of

the candidate brochure, the League encourages the Procedure Committee to explore less expensive alternatives.

The League appreciates the dedication of the chair in managing the details of the election process and believes the Procedure Committee did a responsible job carrying out the administrative tasks. Yet even if each and every aspect were managed to perfection, an election process that garners the attention of only a tiny fraction of the community must be reexamined. Increasing voter participation continues to represent an enormous challenge and may require a fresh approach. Below, please find a detailed commentary on all aspects of the 2008 Committee election.

Overview.

In a year when 70% of Scarsdale residents flocked to the polls in the national election, it is troubling that one week later only 3% of Scarsdale voters participated in the Committee election. Even in the best of years, the Committee election engages upwards of only 6% of Scarsdale qualified voters. Given that the Committee prepares the slate of officials who will serve as our Village Trustees and Mayor, those who are entrusted with managing our local budget and quality of life, the League urges the Procedure Committee to focus on increasing voter involvement.

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

The Vote.

Voter Turnout. To underscore the Procedure Committee Chair's observation in her letter of November 24, 2008, perhaps the most disappointing election result is the continued low turnout of voters. The turnout of 385 voters was a decrease in voter participation from 2007's 450 voters and remains one of the lowest over the past ten years. Since 1998, the tally of votes cast has fluctuated from a low of 353 voters in 2005 to a peak of 624 voters in 2006, with an approximate average of 450 voters across the decade. As voter turnout represents approximately 3-6% of resident voters of Scarsdale, the League encourages the Procedure 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 is confident that a task force of Procedure and Administrative Committee members could identify and implement a myriad of tailored approaches to reach Scarsdale's different demographics. As an example, the League again recommends a representative be sent to the first Parent Teacher Association meeting of each of the elementary schools to describe the nonpartisan system and to generate interest in the election. The League believes that 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 Procedure Committee's efforts to rely upon its website to improve voter education and participation. The League commends the Procedure Committee for including online both candidate information and voting procedures and believes the website holds even greater potential for voter involvement.

Voting. The League commends the Procedure Committee's year over year increase in use of the absentee ballot from nine to seventeen individuals. The League appreciates that the

Procedure 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. If communicated appropriately, the League believes resident voters will become accustomed to early voting. The League hopes the Procedure Committee will examine the early voting ballot potential and develop a plan to publicize and implement its widespread use.

After conducting its own online voting study, the League no longer recommends the Procedure Committee explore this channel as the security of online voting cannot yet be guaranteed. The League appreciates the Procedure Committee's willingness to consider the League's report and was pleased that the Procedure Committee had success with the recommendation to use double blind envelopes for absentee ballots.

The Ballot. The League commends the Procedure Committee for providing voters with a clear and easy to understand ballot.

Polling Location, 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 and was pleased that the Procedure Committee designated five "Voters Only" parking spaces adjacent to Village Hall. The League understands that this year's calendar made it impossible for the Procedure Committee to hold elections on a Tuesday so as to avoid court dates. The League hopes the Procedure Committee will be able to return to voting on Tuesdays when court is not in session.

Finances. For both financial and environmental reasons, the League encourages the Procedure Committee to explore alternative methods of providing information to Scarsdale residents. The League supports consideration of a postcard-only mailing to households. The postcard would contain relevant information and would direct residents to the website for candidate information and early voting procedures. The postcard could be supplemented by a limited production of candidate information brochures distributed to the public library and Village Hall. Other ideas for consideration include running a full page advertisement in the Scarsdale Inquirer listing candidate information and distributing the information electronically through neighborhood associations. Before a complete rollout of the postcard method, the League would encourage the Procedure Committee to give thought to a test pilot of a representative sampling of the Scarsdale population. The League also notes that the Procedure Committee will need to assess the impact the elimination of the large mailing will have on its fundraising abilities. The League would appreciate receiving a copy of the Procedure Committee's financial report for this election year at your earliest convenience.

Publicity. The League commends the Procedure 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 Procedure Committee website. The League understands that the Procedure Committee would have preferred more prominent coverage of some of its early publicity from the Scarsdale Inquirer. One suggestion would be to designate a Procedure Committee member to be responsible for public relations and to work proactively with the media. The League commends the Procedure Committee for reaching out to various community organizations, including the neighborhood associations, to attract candidates and to raise awareness of the election. Signage also helped remind voters to participate.

Notice to Vote Brochure. The League found the Notice to Vote brochure informative and timely and was pleased to note the more favorable absentee ballot due date. This year, residents had ample time to comply with the absentee ballot requirements. The League does recommend exploring a more environmentally and budget friendly method of disseminating information.

Number of Candidates per Vacancy. It is important to note that the Procedure 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 Committee members cannot be overemphasized as the Committee's nominations of Mayor and Trustees are most often tantamount to election. The League recognizes that the Procedure Committee expends enormous energies to present voters with a choice for each vacancy and appreciates the Procedure Committee's commitment to a contested election. However, the League believes the community would benefit from a more systematic approach to filling vacancies if applications are not received by the deadline.

Conclusion. The League appreciates the continued efforts of the Procedure Committee to administer the Committee election and lauds its dedication to the nonpartisan system. The League hopes the Procedure 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 believes there is great opportunity to improve voter participation and urges the Procedure Committee to take advantage of the nation's heightened interest in early voting. The League encourages the Procedure 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,

Jane Veron
Chair, Village Election Systems
Scarsdale League of Women Voters

Adie Shore
President
Scarsdale League of Women Voters

cc: Bruce Wells, Vice Chair, Procedure Committee