

January 18, 2023

Alissa Baum, President  
Jyoti Ruta, Chair, School Election Committee  
The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale  
PO Box 495  
Scarsdale, NY 10583

Dear Ms. Baum and Ms. Ruta,

On behalf of the 2022-2023 SBNC Administrative Committee, we thank you and the League of Women Voters of Scarsdale for providing an opportunity to meet with you about this year's SBNC election process. We recognize the benefits of maintaining continuity in this process for the benefit of the entire Scarsdale community and are grateful to our predecessors for offering their advice and assistance to support our effort. While we are pleased with our committee's efforts regarding member participation levels, publicity, and the election, we are always looking to improve our work and our processes.

### **Member Participation**

This year all eight SBNC members completing their term in 2022 joined the Admin Committee. We were able to fill all officer positions. The Election Chair and Vice Chair worked collaboratively with the Resolution Chair and Vice Chair, with the guidance and support of last year's Chairs.

Current Administrative Committee members are: Susi Coplan (Election Chair); Claire (Yin) Yang (Election Vice Chair); Sarah E. Bell (Resolution Chair); Laura Gelblum (Resolution Vice Chair); Jon Lemle (SBNC Chair); Deborah Skolnik (SBNC Vice Chair); David Benderson; Lara Chassin (SNAP Representative); Jennifer Fischer; Kathleen Gray (Member at Large); Kerry Hayes (Member at Large); Seema Jaggi (Treasurer); Swapna Kanekar; Cecelia Anon Kowalski; Laura Ying Liu, (Secretary); Chris Marks (Webmaster); Ekta Sahni; Amy Schiff; Purnima Srivastava; Cindy Yau

Last year's Election Chair Laura Liu moved into the role of Secretary, taking guidance from her predecessor Kathy Gray. Both Laura Liu and Laura Gelblum were incredibly helpful advising this year's election chairs, outlining process and timing based on 2022, and efficiently transitioning the shared (Google) drive for full access to prior years' documents. The Election chairs are also indebted to Kathy Gray who continued to advise and support our work by answering questions throughout the months leading up to the Election; it was very helpful to tap into her historical knowledge about the Election process.

Sarah Bell and Laura Gelblum surveyed Admin and Nominating committee members to obtain current feedback about the Resolution changes implemented this year.

As webmaster, Chris Marks managed [www.scarsdalesbnc.org](http://www.scarsdalesbnc.org) and ensured the site was consistently updated throughout the candidate recruitment and election announcement process, aligning with release dates throughout the months leading up to the election.

Lara Chassin served as SNAP Representative, receiving support in that role from Sarah Bell.

All 2022-2023 meetings were held virtually via Zoom, to accommodate schedules as effectively as possible.

The first Admin Committee meeting was held on August 4, 2022, to welcome new members, elect officers, and review the process and finances. Additional meetings with the full committee held on September 8, October 17, and November 29 were focused on updates from members regarding recruitment of SBNC candidates, discussion of the Resolution and logistics planning for the election. The chair and vice chair met separately to ensure all responsibilities for the election planning were covered. The chair scheduled volunteers through use of sign-up genius, and provided instructions to all volunteers for their shifts. We plan to schedule a post-election meeting in the coming weeks to further review this year's election and begin planning for next year. This work will include reviewing the potential candidate list in preparation for next year's outreach.

This year's Admin Committee will schedule the Spring 2023 meeting at the conclusion of the SBNC's nomination work, at which we will transition the graduating 3<sup>rd</sup> year SBNC members to the Admin Committee, and review roles in anticipation of electing new officers and transitioning positions.

The transition process was effective this year as Election and Resolution Chairs and Vice Chairs worked closely with their predecessors to get institutional knowledge and guidance. The predecessors reviewed draft documents, provided detailed feedback, brought a historical perspective, and in general mentored and counseled this year's Chairs.

The Committee continued to use [SBNCElection@gmail.com](mailto:SBNCElection@gmail.com) account for both email communications and Google Drive for ease of collaboration and for archiving digital files for future reference. The Committee actively used digital files and hard copy files from previous years. The timelines and instructions to run the election are updated with complete and accurate information to help plan for the 23-24 SBNC Election. The Chairs updated the SBNC Candidate Outreach files with prospective candidates' contact information as well as their responses to our recruitment efforts to prepare for next year's Committee.

The election went relatively smoothly with steady day-of voter turnout, and we believe this was due to contested elections in three out of five elementary districts. We do not believe the Covid situation this year hampered voter turnout. The fact that schools are open and many activities are ongoing with necessary risk mitigations seems to have conditioned the public to feel comfortable with coming out to vote. At the same time, publicizing the availability of a mail-in ballot option appears to be beneficial to the overall process.

## **Policies, Procedures, & Guidelines**

During the fall, the Resolution chair and vice chair contacted all current SBNC members, BOE members and a few other key stakeholders to seek feedback on the Resolution Amendments enacted last year. They received around twenty thoughtful responses which mainly focused on the procedures relating to off-book references and to the “interview questions” asked of the BOE candidates.

Following the feedback, the assessment and recommendation was that there would be no amendments made to the SBNC Resolution this year.

## **Community Outreach and Candidate Recruitment**

The Committee’s goal is always to have competitive elections in all neighborhoods. Recruitment for the 2023 election began in mid-August 2022 following the initial of the Administrative Committee where all members were urged to begin reaching out to potential candidates. The committee reviewed and discussed a spreadsheet of prospective candidates, made revisions and additions, and coordinated who would contact whom for effective personal outreach. Participation in recruitment was high this year and attendance at meetings was robust. We were able to fully utilize all members, assigning responsibilities to many.

A press release calling for SBNC candidates was issued on September 19, 2022. Announcements appeared in the Scarsdale Inquirer issues of September 23 and 30, and on the Scarsdale10583 website on September 23. The press release calling for candidates was also distributed to all the PTAs, running in the Sunday newsletters for multiple weeks, and it was sent via the SNAP representatives to all the neighborhood organizations. Committee Members also attended elementary school PTA meetings at Quaker Ridge and Greenacres to spread the word based on the timing of those scheduled meetings. Availability/timing of the other schools’ meetings in the fall did not align with the recruitment season.

The Admin and Nominating committees also received the release and were encouraged to reach out to friends and acquaintances who might be interested in running for SBNC. Our outreach to TVCC was done through Sarah Bell’s participation on the Forum, and SNAP representatives supported outreach efforts through their channels.

One issue worth noting with respect to this year’s recruiting efforts was some uncertainty around the 2023 Nominating Committee planned meeting times. Historically, the SBNC meetings have been held on Sunday afternoons, in recent years through a mix of zoom and in-person formats. During the last nomination season, some committee members inquired about changing the time of the meetings. Since the 2022 schedule was already confirmed and calendared, it was decided that the continuing members of the Nominating committee would raise the point with the new Chair/Vice Chair and consider options if possible.

The meeting time review process took place in the fall, so we a) did not include specific SBNC meeting times on the community calendar and b) were not able to share the planned time with potential candidates. Ultimately, through surveys and voting from the nominating committee, the chair and vice chair determined that they would schedule a combination of Sunday afternoon and Sunday evening meetings. The admin committee has been told that this outcome is satisfactory for all the nominating committee members, and this plan is being shared with the newly elected members during their orientation.

That said, we strongly recommend that meeting times are specified for potential candidates in advance of the recruitment season. While the candidates who ultimately ran were comfortable without set times for the nominating meetings, we believe having that information would better support our outreach and recruitment efforts.

Based on the initial publicity and committee outreach, we started receiving applications in early October. As of the November 14 deadline for candidates to submit their applications, we had competitive elections in four out of five elementary school districts.

Two candidates withdrew just after the deadline, leaving three of five contested districts. Three candidates ran for one position in Edgewood. Three candidates ran for three positions in Fox Meadow. Four candidates ran for three positions in Greenacres. One candidate ran for one position in Heathcote. Four candidates ran for two positions in Quaker Ridge.

We communicated with the candidates at several points in the process. We acknowledged receipt of their applications and encouraged them to reach out and ask neighborhood friends and acquaintances to support their candidacy. Before we published the press release with their biographical information, we asked them to review and approve. A few days prior to the election, we sent another communication reminding them to reach out to their potential supporters again and ask them to vote. In this email, we also wished them luck and explained how they would be notified of the election results. We also responded to their individual questions in a timely manner.

## **Publicity**

This year, the SBNC election was publicized in several ways. On November 28, 2022 we issued a press release announcing the candidates and the fact that the election would be conducted both in-person and by mail-in ballot. The Scarsdale Inquirer published this press release on December 3, and they ran an article including candidate information again on January 6. The local news website Scarsdale10583 ran the press release on December 2 and again on January 4. All PTA newsletters published the election information on January 8.

One candidate inquired about whether they were allowed to print out ballots and suggest mailing in to friends and acquaintances, and chair advised this was fine, reminding the candidate to play close attention to the mail-in ballot requirements (clearly addressed, signed across seal, mailed in by deadline of January 10 at 4:00PM. It appears this strategy was employed by at least one candidate based on mail-in ballot receipt of a good quantity of similarly labeled envelopes.

Additionally, the hard copies of Mail-In ballots were available (25 copies of each) at both the Scarsdale Public Library and the Village Hall by December 2, 2022. It is worth noting that when unused ballots were collected from Village Hall and the Scarsdale Public Library on the morning of January 10, the chair noted that no ballots were taken from these locations. One voter commented that someone on library staff was not familiar with where the ballots were located, so we have noted in the procedure that the chair should ensure that the library director is aware of the ballots and that they are available at the front and information desks.

A full 11x17" mailer in maroon was sent to all households in the Scarsdale School district, announcing the election and detailed information about the candidates, emphasizing that votes could be cast in person or by mail-in ballot. We also instructed the public to bring the mail-in ballots to the Heathcote post office to ensure timely receipt.

Although the Admin Committee used the postcard mailer format in both 2021 and 2022 this year the chair and vice-chair decided that again producing a full mailer to provide detailed information would be helpful to allow residents to have candidate information immediately available on the brochure. We both noted that having all the info on the mailer was helpful with the SBNC election process to help support the voters' decisions. Additionally, since the timing of the mailer receipt was just after the holiday season, we thought a complete brochure provided a 'top of mind' reminder to get out and vote (or drop off a ballot at the Heathcote post office). We recognize that this change significantly increased our publicity costs significantly, with the printing of the mailer increasing from \$812 in 2022 to approximately \$1500 in 2023. We have not received the final bill from Printcraft as of the date of this letter, it is expected next week.

## **Election**

The logistics of election day generally rolled out efficiently this year. The hours of voting, 7:00 am - 10:00 am and 2:00 - 9:00 pm were adequate. Election set-up, the election itself, and in-person ballot counting proceeded smoothly thanks to many of the procedures established in prior years. 'Vote Here' Signage was clear, and the voters came in a steady stream. The wait was never longer than a couple of minutes, until there was more traffic in the early evening leading into the elementary schools' PTA meetings and the PTC/Child meeting. Having the meeting scheduled on the same night as the election may have allowed the SBNC to obtain a few additional votes as people were arriving who either had not voted or were not aware of the election taking place that night.

We collected mail-in ballots from the post office box beginning weekly in mid-December, and every other day during the week leading up to the election, and the chair alphabetized envelopes as they came in. Mail-in ballots increased in the week directly leading to the election. After the 4pm deadline on election day, volunteers started to sort the mail-in ballots by checking them on the voter registry.

We had seven (7) in-person voters whose names were not listed on the district-provided printed resident rolls (sorted by neighborhood). We cross-referenced these lists with the county and address lists and determined that these individuals were eligible voters. Four of those voters resided in the Mamaroneck Strip, and it was determined that those addresses were inadvertently excluded on the printed list but were available for cross checking via the county and 'To the Family of' mailing lists. The election chair has contacted the district

office to ensure that a note is made for future years and has updated the procedure with a reminder to specifically request ALL residents in the school district are printed out.

We received 2 comments from in-person voters about the lack of ‘Election parking’ signs. This exclusion was an oversight, as this year’s chairs did not note a detail about parking signs in the prior procedures. We believe this may have been due to the significant difference in elections during 2021 (fully mail-in) and 2022. We have updated the procedure/planning timeline to include a note that the election chair should request voter parking signage and ensure it is posted at SMS. We owe special thanks to the staff of both Village Hall and the Scarsdale Schools for their assistance in getting our committee the information, materials, and set-ups to run the election.

Both in-person and mail-in ballots were counted in accordance with our Resolution by a group of Admin Committee members at the Middle School after the polls closed at 9pm. The group worked in pairs to assess the validity of each ballot and to tally the votes by district.

Voter turnout this year was strong. Three out of five elementary districts had contested elections. 461 residents voted in this year’s SBNC election, of which 164 were via mail-in ballots. This tracked along the lines of last year’s election (448).

#### **TOTAL VOTES in SBNC ELECTIONS 2013-2023**

	<b>2023<sup>1</sup></b>	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Edgewood	<b>41(5)</b>	130	119	21	25	96	39	22	39	67	64
Fox Meadow	<b>39(1)</b>	103	151	26	38	161	107	74	200	121	97
Greenacres	<b>115 (44)</b>	83	149	19	61	46	115	27	51	121	55
Heathcote	<b>17(5)</b>	31	32	37	73	101	20	34	94	104	61
Quaker Ridge	<b>85 (109)</b>	101	104	34	43	56	74	22	47	112	63
Total	<b>461 (164)</b>	448	555	137	265	460	355	179	431	525	340

#### **<sup>1</sup>In-person (Mail-In)**

2023 continued the developing trend for voters to participate in the process by mail-in ballot; this year mail-in ballots grew to 164, more than doubling last year’s count (69). Additionally, 40 mail-in ballots were deemed invalid for one or more of the following reasons: 1) no valid voter could be identified on the

envelope; 2) the envelope was not signed by the voter or 3) name/address did not match any available records. These invalidated ballots were not able to be sorted by neighborhood.

### **Finances and Fundraising**

Estimated expenses to run the campaign this year totaled \$2,925. Printing the larger mailer was \$1560 vs. \$812 last year and postage increased to \$1,226 vs. \$1,131 last year. Other annual expenses include our P.O. Box fee (\$126) and hosting the website (\$13). We have not yet been billed for the mailer/postage as Printcraft is behind in their billing.

The SBNC started the year (Fall 2022) with \$933 in available funds. Through January we have received an additional \$830 in donations, and currently have \$1733 on hand. It appears that our donation pacing is behind last year's contribution, and recognize that we need to make an aggressive push to secure additional monies given the current shortfall. We will redouble our efforts here, and will focus on connecting with current and former SBNC members.

The SBNC Administrative Committee members appreciate the League's continued interest in and support of the SBNC election and the non-partisan process. We thank you for your ongoing dedication to the civic well-being of Scarsdale.

Sincerely,

Susi Coplan & Claire Yang  
SBNC Administrative Committee Election Chair & Vice Chair

cc: 2022-23 SBNC Administration Committee