

April 8, 2010

LWVS Comments on the proposed 2010-11 Scarsdale School Budget

The League of Women Voters of Scarsdale appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed 2010-2011 Scarsdale School Budget. The League offers sincere thanks to the Administration and members of the Board of Education for participating in our consensus meeting on March 22, 2010 and for responding to our extensive list of questions. Given the current, challenging economic conditions, the League recognizes the difficulty in designing a school budget that retains core educational values while minimizing tax increases. The League appreciates the effort that the Administration and Board put into making information available and reaching out to the community for its input. The League supports the budget presented on March 1, 2010 and encourages the Board to continue to explore creative solutions to control costs, raise revenue and study productivity. The League awaits the District's decisions on managing the tax rate increase given the additional \$400,000 tax revenue deficit.

The League acknowledges and commends the Board and Administration on its historic teacher contract negotiation, which saves the District \$1.9 million over two years. As a result of this agreement, important programs and services will be maintained at their current levels enabling Scarsdale to maintain its core educational values. We note that by extending the contract for one additional year, the District has limited its ability to negotiate other aspects of the agreement that may have generated future savings and concessions greater than those agreed to in this contract revision. Among the concerns are salary levels and cost-sharing of benefits that will be frozen for an additional year, and the inability to lay off teachers except in situations where there is a decrease in student enrollment, which could affect the process by which some programming can be evaluated. The League suggests that because of these constraints, the Board and Administration should take extra care when making new non-tenured staffing commitments.

The League recognizes the need for keeping a 4% budget reserve level and is in favor of doing so in light of the potential for either unanticipated expenses or decreased revenue that might occur next year, particularly due to the uncertainty of future tax certiorari grievances and receipt of state aid. The League has a strong view on tax reassessment, and wishes to reaffirm the need for a countywide and village-wide revaluation/reassessment. We hope that the Board vigorously supports a village plan for revaluation/reassessment within Scarsdale.

The League encourages the Village and School District to continue to look for creative ways to partner to decrease the overall taxpayer burden. The League appreciates the ongoing cost-sharing programs, including facilities and transportation for the summer day camp program, sanitation and fields for

recreational activities. We recommend continued evaluation of cost-sharing opportunities, particularly in the areas of health and safety.

The Board has announced that it will be forming an advisory committee, made up of a cross-constituency group, to consider the feasibility of additional sources of revenue. The League commends the Board for taking the initiative to explore different sources of revenue and for doing so in an inclusive manner.

The League acknowledges the thorough process that the Board and Administration have undertaken to evaluate the funding levels for the Youth Services Project and the Teen Center. We look forward to the upcoming analysis being done by the Board on the best method of delivering social support services in the District. The League encourages the Board to continue to find a level at which to support the Teen Center. Though educational programming is the Board's priority and should not be jeopardized, the Board should continue to acknowledge the Teen Center's value to the community.

The League encourages the Board and Administration to continue the process of evaluating the Foreign Language Elementary Schools ("FLES") program, and looks forward to learning the outcome of the assessment. The League understands the rationale for deferring the funding for a Mandarin language program and for reconsidering this initiative when economic conditions improve.

The League has learned that after the Preliminary Proposed Budget was drafted, a \$400,000 reduction in tax revenues was reported due to settled tax grievances. Without further budget adjustments, this revenue reduction will result in a higher tax rate than originally proposed. The League's statement on the proposed budget is based on the information available at the time of the March 22, 2010 meeting. The League may comment on further budget changes as they become available.

In conclusion, we thank the members of the Board of Education, Dr. Michael McGill and the entire Administration for the help that they have given to the League of Women Voters this year in its study of the proposed school budget. The Administration and Board's willingness to listen to community input has made this year's budget process a very inclusive endeavor. We look forward to the continuation of an open budget process again next year.

The League recommends that the community vote "yes" on the proposed 2010-2011 Scarsdale school budget on May 18th, 2010.

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League of Women Voters School Budget Committee Co-Chairs

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