

September 25, 2017

To the Board of Education:

The League of Women Voters has been dedicated since its founding in 1921 to the ideals of the democratic process. As a nonpartisan political organization whose core mission is to promote the informed and active participation of citizens in government, the League of Women Voters of Scarsdale has a long history of studying and commenting on local government engagement of community input into the decision making process.

While not without precedent, it is unusual for the League of Women Voters of Scarsdale Board of Directors (“League Board”) to issue statements in advance of a League member consensus meeting; however, after discussion, we determined that the following major concerns about the current School District facilities bond process do warrant a League Board statement at this time:

- The School District has made available to the public an extraordinarily large volume of data during six public meetings over the past four months; yet, this information has neither been presented in a digestible format, nor has it remained constant, with plans and priorities, and even the numerical ranking and definition of priority work items, subject to change from meeting to meeting.
- At the same time, the community has yet to be provided with a framework for understanding what our school buildings need in order to preserve and enhance a high quality Scarsdale education.
- The community also has not been provided a clear statement of the School Board’s overall objective for this bond as it relates to the quality of our schools and Scarsdale educational values.
- Meanwhile, major bond related decisions have already been made over the summer with insufficient opportunity for public input and insufficient School Board deliberation to fully inform the public in a manner that allows the community to engage, question, challenge and/or support the School Board’s educational rationale and fiscal assumptions.
- In addition, a compressed schedule of School Board-directed building and District-wide committee meetings, which did not begin until this month, does not allow sufficient time for the School Board to consider and respond to possible committee recommendations for substantive changes to either the proposed Greenacres School renovation and addition plan or the proposed uses for the remainder of the bond before the October 16 statutory deadline to issue a final bond resolution for a December 2017 bond vote.
- Moreover, given the short amount of time and the absence of School Board meetings between now and October 16, members of the community may reasonably assume that there is no opportunity to significantly modify either the Greenacres School proposal or the proposed uses for the remainder of the bond.

- Finally, although the public was told back in May that there would be a “full blown bond package” and public “forums” in September,¹ a “December 2017 bond vote” timeline now appears to be driving a process that does not allow time for the community to weigh in on a complete bond package before the School Board would need to adopt a final bond resolution.

The League Board maintains that rather than allowing a goal of a particular bond vote date to determine the extent of community participation, a goal of maximum community engagement and input into the bond decision-making process should be a School Board priority in deciding the bond timeline.

In order to develop a school bond that is a product of a District-community partnership, the School Board should proactively encourage such partnership by ensuring the final bond proposal accurately reflects community values and priorities. We further maintain that regardless of the extent of community input since the start of the bond process in 2014, the community has not had sufficient opportunity to weigh in on whether the current iteration of the proposal released to the public September 11 accurately reflects community values.

We also note that as elected officials accountable to the public, members of the School Board should allow themselves time to deliberate fully and openly on all aspects of the bond proposal in order to give the public both insight into their decision-making process and opportunity to weigh in on their deliberations.

We therefore recommend that the School Board:

- 1) **Set a bond vote date that prioritizes community participation, allows for a more deliberative School Board process, and involves the School Board’s proactive engagement of the community’s input; and**
- 2) **Immediately address issues of community engagement by adding multiple dedicated meetings for public presentations and community feedback to ensure the School Board’s final decision is guided by community values and priorities.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda Doucette-Ashman and Janice Starr, Co-Presidents
Mary Beth Evans, Chair, School Bond Study Committee
League of Women Voters of Scarsdale

¹ Board of Education meeting and *Scarsdale Board of Education Meeting Highlights*, May 8, 2017.