



## **2003 Winnetka Caucus Council Proposed Platforms**

### **Library Platform**

The Library Committee of the 2003 Caucus would like to commend the Trustees for their dedication, excellent work and creativity in dealing with fiscal pressures during the past year while maintaining a high level of service and satisfaction by the library patrons.

**1. The Caucus recommends that the library continue to help Winnetka residents learn how to utilize its online resources.**

The results of the 2003 survey questions relating to the availability of online database and research resources indicated that depending upon the online service, about a third use occasionally, a third were unaware of the services and about a third of the respondents to this question said that they would never use the on-line services (out of approximately 435 people responding to this question). Interest was shown for a class at the library (39%) as well as a short step-by-step written guide (20%) on how to use the libraries' services and databases. Residents look to the library staff, the Source newsletter, the library's website and actual use as the way to learn more about the library.

**2. The Caucus recommends that the library continue to manage its fiscal affairs as conservatively as possible so that it can maintain its high level of service to the community. We recommend that reduction of both expenditures for periodicals and investment in electronic technology be considered as possible sources of savings. The Caucus further recommends that the Board continue to seek creative ways to reduce spending and avoid deficits.**

Residents are not interested in paying user fees to support adult or children's' programs (66 and 77% against, respectively). User fees were generally not considered acceptable except for possibly Books on Tape/CD and Best Selling Books by 28% and 26% of people responding (138 and 127 out of roughly 497 total library respondents). Acceptable ways to reduce the budget deficit included reducing the number of periodicals (43%), reducing purchases of online databases (40%), and reducing the hours/days of operation (36%). A referendum to finance continuing operations was unappealing to 74% of respondents (131 indicated that this would be suitable to fund deficits out of a total responding of about 490). Receiving courteous, helpful service for books and information is very important and should be maintained at the current level. Personal service and information was found to be slightly less important for computers and online assistance. Almost the entire responding universe of library users, about 488 respondents, noted that the library staff was important to very important.

**3. The Caucus recommends that the library maintain its current schedule of being open on Sunday afternoons only during the school year, if possible.**

There has been an ongoing interest in opening the library on Sunday afternoons in the summer. If money is an issue, however, the majority (258 of 366 respondents or 67% of respondents) prefers that the schedule remain unchanged. Once again, the idea of a tax referendum was ranked as least appealing of all alternatives given (153 of 255 or 43% of respondents to the specific question were against a referendum as a funding source) for keeping the library open on Sundays in the summer. Closing the library on Friday, to offset the summer Sunday afternoon, was considered a good option by 39% of the people who responded to the question. The Board could also consider this.

## **Village Platform**

This year, the Village portion of the Caucus survey asked questions in four areas of interest:

1. Term limits for Village Trustees,
2. Building and Zoning issues, particularly in regard to variances and design review,
3. Exploration of the possibility of Home Rule, and
4. Use of Post Office property upon expiration of lease.

**1. The Caucus recommends that no action be taken to change the number of terms allowed. Responses indicated that residents need more information before coming to any conclusion on this issue.**

Term Limits

The results of the survey were inconclusive as to changing the Winnetka tradition of limiting Village Trustees to two consecutive terms.

**2.1 The Caucus recommends the Village Board grant construction permits without the need for variances on existing non-conforming structures if no further non-conformities would be created, and the existing non-conformity be not increased.**

Building and Zoning

Variances

Through the years, because of changing zoning regulations, many existing single family homes have non-conforming structures. In this year's survey, there was an overwhelming response (over 75%) to eliminate the need to seek a variance when applying for a construction permit for the existing non-conforming portion of the structure.

**2.2 Since there is an ad hoc committee studying the issue of a Design Review Board for the Village, and no clear mandate from the residents, the Caucus recommends that the Trustees thoughtfully study the ad hoc committee's findings.**

Design Review:

The question relating to establishing a voluntary single-family residence design review board, as in past years' surveys, did not result in a consensus either way.

- 3. Since the Village Trustees are currently studying the concept of Home Rule for Winnetka, the Caucus recommends and encourages that the Village Trustees educate the residents about the pros and cons of Home Rule in a fair and balanced manner.**

#### Home Rule

The survey data was inconclusive regarding exploring the concept of Home Rule for Winnetka. A sizable percent of the respondents were looking for more information on this matter.

- 4. The Caucus recommends that the Village Trustees and/or any ad hoc committees created to study the question of the use of the Post Office property, consider the wishes of the residents in accordance with the survey information.**

#### Post Office Property

The Post Office lease expires in the year 2009 and will not likely be renewed. There was a consensus among the respondents to the survey that the future use of the Post Office property should include, in order of priority:

- 1) commercial use
- 2) mixed use
- 3) parks/open space.

### **CONCLUSION**

These recommendations are submitted by the 2003 Caucus Council in the hope that they will guide the Trustees and help the Village of Winnetka to continue to grow and prosper in the years to come.

## **Schools Platform**

- 1. The Caucus recommends that the School Board and Administration of District 36 continue their efforts to communicate to all residents of Winnetka regarding their budget management policies and practices and to enhance the taxpayers' confidence in the District's fiscal responsibility.**
  - The Board and Administration should continue efforts to make information regarding fiscal management initiatives and cost containment measures more accessible to the public.
  - The Board and Administration should create a communication plan in anticipation of future teacher contract negotiations that will address residents' concerns.

- The Board and Administration should find ways to communicate more effectively through the Pioneer Press in an effort to reach the greatest number of residents of all ages.
- 2. The Caucus recommends that the School Board and Administration of District 36, when increased funding is needed, consider seeking that funding by referendum less frequently in larger increments rather than in smaller amounts more frequently.**
- In contrast to last year's split vote on funding, respondents to this survey favored more funding less frequently (67%) vs. less funding more frequently (37%).
- 3. The Caucus recommends that the Board and Administration should explore the idea of creating advisory committees consisting of both community residents and school officials to address specific issues from time to time.**
- With a full 91% of survey respondents considering this a viable concept, the Board and Administration should consider putting this concept to work, potentially to address some of the more challenging fiscal management issues outlined above.

## **Parks Platform**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A review of this year's survey results yields three key themes:

- Communication remains an important priority for the District, including the desire for more transparency of financial information
- Teenage programming and facilities are not seen as an urgent priority by the full community
- The highest community priority for the District continues to be the park land itself and the most visible sports using the land

### **COMMUNICATION**

- There is a high level of awareness of the District's wide variety of programs for all ages (81% of all respondents), the need for non-resident fees to maintain facilities (63%) and the extensive work done on the District's playgrounds (68%).
- There is little understanding of how to access the budget and other financial records (72% said no they do not know these records are located at the library).
- Many respondents are unaware of the fact that state, federal and independent donations are used to supplement taxes and user fees (54% said they are not aware of this) and that indoor ice, paddle tennis, golf and tennis are self funded (47% said they not aware of this)

- Most respondents preferred either Park Place (40%) or the website (42%) by a wide margin over other communication vehicles
- People over 50 and with longer residence in the community tended to be more knowledgeable about the District

**1. Based on those responses the Caucus recommends:**

- **The Park District website be upgraded to provide more comprehensive information through links to such things as budgets, strategic plan and the Parks Foundation site**
- **Park Place and the website should complement each other to accommodate the community's different styles and preferences for getting information**
- **Special focus should be played on communication with newer and younger members of the community as they tended to be less informed about the District**

**TEENAGE PROGRAMMING**

Last year's platform asked the Park District to focus efforts on teen programs. It appears that progress has been made in this important area. When parents of teenage children were asked about the present teen programs and facilities, more than half (53%) said there were enough. When asked what types of programs the District should focus on most, parents said sports (37%) and ski programs (33%).

A related question asked whether a new facility focusing on teens that would include a gym and multi-use rooms was needed. Respondents said no (67%) by almost exactly two to one. Respondents over 50 years old overwhelmingly answered no while those under 50 were almost even in their yes and no responses.

**2. The Caucus recommends:**

- **The broad range of teenage programs should continue with an emphasis on sports activities, especially skiing.**
- **Although Board members and staff close to the situation are very concerned about the facility situation, solutions that do not call for a new building should continue to be the emphasis of the District's efforts, given the heavy majority opposing the building**

**COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS OF THE PARK DISTRICT**

When asked for their main expectations of the Park District, respondents overwhelmingly answered adequate parks (35%). Sporting activities (22%), budget management (17%) and open space (13%) received significant response totals. Specific programs such as summer (6%), teen (4%), senior (3%) and toddler (less than 1%) were well behind in total votes. However, responses in age groups that use the services were significant (For example, summer programs received 51% response in the 40-49 age group)

### **3. The Caucus Recommends:**

- **The community sees the District's primary mission as parks and sporting activities. This does not imply that programs should be given less attention than they are at present. What it does say is that primary focus should be on the park spaces and the major sports activities run by the Park District for the benefit of the residents.**
- **The District should make every effort to make its budgets and finances very transparent. The community is extremely sensitive to financial issues and with each advancing age bracket this concern increased. The District has a compelling story to tell, running an 8 million dollar district on 3 million dollars in taxes. It is one of the best financially managed districts in the country.**

### **SUMMARY**

The Park District appears to have made progress on two of the major Caucus platform issues raised last year, communication and teenage programming. This year's recommendations are submitted in the context of making a great Park District even better. Many of the excellent facilities, programs and staff are still underappreciated by the community. It is our hope that the suggestions above help "get the word out" about a significant contributor to the quality of life in Winnetka.