

2005 Winnetka Caucus Platform

2005 Village Platform

1. REVISING THE LIQUOR ORDINANCE

By a 2-to-1 margin, Winnetka residents reject the concept of what is commonly referred to as a “bar”. The age of respondents affected results, with opinion most closely divided (46% in favor to 53% opposed) among those 44 and under.

The overwhelming opposition to a bar suggests that the notion of a “bar,” with or without music, should not be revisited by the Caucus or Village Council in the near future.

2. HOME PRESERVATION

I. Studying Historic Districts

Winnetka residents strongly favor the study of historic districts (61%), and a significant number would like their own homes to be in one (41%). Although the greatest enthusiasm for having their homes in a district existed among those whose homes were over 60 years old (50% in favor), owners of even the newest homes (10 years old or less) expressed a significant interest in having their homes in an historic district (26% in favor). A substantial 11% of respondents needed “more information,” most often about the financial consequences of historic districts as well as what architectural attributes make a home “eligible” for inclusion.

As part of its study of historic districts, the Village should develop an inventory of Winnetka’s housing stock. The Village can use the information gleaned from an inventory to shape both its study of historic districts and its development of other preservation programs, such as the clearinghouse discussed below.

The Caucus recommends that the Village study the creation of one or more historic districts, including the economic advantages and disadvantages for individual homeowners as well as the community. The Village should explore the possibility of receiving a grant from the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, as did Wilmette, to help offset costs associated with studying and creating historic districts.

II. Protecting Winnetka’s Character

Survey-takers are typically our most civic-minded citizens. Village officials should take note of the high percentage (45%) who indicated that they place little or no importance on the preservation of their own homes. Of particular interest, 35% of those whose homes are 60 years and older hold this view.

Some of the laissez-faire responses may reflect resignation, respect for the wishes of a subsequent owner or uncertainty about the financial consequences of preferring preservation over demolition. Nevertheless, the lack of concern, if taken at face value, would strongly suggest that market forces and Village regulation, rather than resident sentimentality or individual initiative, will determine what structures will ultimately stand on these respondents’ properties.

Therefore, the Caucus recommends that Village officials ascertain whether there is community support for enacting measures that would: (1) preserve as many architecturally and historically significant houses as possible; and (2) ensure that the

inevitable replacement houses respect and even enhance the character of the neighborhoods in which they are constructed.

III. **Enhancing the Market for Rehabs**

Finally, whatever their ambitions for their own homes, 71% of respondents strongly support the concept of a voluntary clearinghouse, which, it is hoped, would increase the possibility that a home would be salvaged rather than unnecessarily torn down. The clearinghouse could be launched along with a privately-funded foundation that would seek to purchase, rehab, and re-sell those residences with historic and architectural merit that would otherwise be subject to demolition. Such a foundation would effectively “compete” with spec developers who purchase homes (including some with significant architectural/historic merit) before they come on the market.

Therefore, the Caucus recommends that the Village establish a voluntary clearinghouse to match the owners of older homes with those who would like to rehabilitate such homes. Although the clearinghouse would probably be most easily established on the Village website, accommodation should be made for those who do not like to use or do not have ready access to the Internet.

3. **DRIVING WITH CELL PHONES**

Winnetka residents overwhelmingly favor (71% to 25%) greater regulation of cell phone use while driving, with slightly more supporting the hands-free option (38%) than an outright ban (33%). This is consistent with legal trends as well as the 2001 Caucus Survey and Platform. The public's embrace of cell phone regulation should take precedence over the concern raised by Village police that enforceability will be challenging. This is an especially appropriate time to introduce regulation, as Winnetka residents are necessarily making themselves aware of cell phone regulations recently enacted by the State of Illinois and City of Chicago.

The Caucus recommends that the Village (1) enact its own regulations to limit cell phone use while driving; and (2) seek a regional approach with neighboring communities to enhance enforceability. Whether neighboring communities participate or not, the Village's regulations will help protect Winnetka's drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians. If enacted, the Village should publicize the new regulations widely so that, at a minimum, compliance by Winnetka residents is enhanced.

4. **COMMISSIONING A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY ABOUT NEW CONSTRUCTION AND NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION**

75% of respondents expressed support for a comprehensive, professionally designed survey on the various topics comprising the broader issue of neighborhood preservation. Until now, Caucus surveys have been the principal means of gauging community sentiment about zoning and related issues. This process has necessarily produced piecemeal, at times ambiguous, recommendations to successive Village Councils. The end result has sometimes been seemingly endless study and review rather than measurable change.

Meanwhile, a tone of urgency pervades the many comments received about teardowns and new construction. Many echoed the sentiments of one respondent who decried the growing “urbanization” of Winnetka as light, trees, and space between homes all become scarcer. With speculative developers—not homeowners—initiating approximately three-quarters of all demolitions, the brunt of the impairment of the residential landscape is borne by the neighbors, rather than by those responsible.

The Caucus recommends that the Village promptly commission a professional firm to undertake a comprehensive survey. The survey should include an exploration of the historic district matters referenced in Question 2 as well as community support for other innovative preservation measures. When the survey is complete, the Village should expeditiously develop and publicize a plan in accordance with the survey results.

5. COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

When asked which stores, restaurants or recreational venues outside Winnetka they patronized most frequently, respondents most often mentioned groceries and drugstores, followed by hardware stores, movie theaters and ethnic restaurants. As in the past, repeated requests were made that a hardware store and a stationer be recruited to Winnetka. Attracting these types of establishments would not only increase sales tax revenue, but also enhance residents' sense of Winnetka's commercial districts as "full-service" or comprehensive.

Quality and selection were of significantly greater importance to respondents leaving Winnetka to conduct their business than was parking. Finally, the sentiment expressed by a plurality of the respondents that Winnetka's commercial districts should principally serve Village residents invites caution by the Ad Hoc Post Office Committee and Village Council when formulating the development plan for the Post Office parcel. This sentiment would seem to suggest that residents might not want to model the post office parcel on, for example, Renaissance Place in Highland Park or The Glen.

The extensive information about most-patronized businesses will be provided to the BCDC for analysis and action.

The Caucus recommends that Village officials consider the results of the current parking study in light of the fact that other factors outweighed parking as the reason Winnetka residents went elsewhere to shop and play.

Further, more initiative should promptly be taken by the BCDC to attract the kinds of businesses residents have been requesting for several years, specifically hardware, stationery and ethnic restaurants.

Finally, for a greater sense of community, the Village, Park District and Chamber of Commerce should collaborate to produce the kinds of special events that 70% of survey respondents support, such as art fairs, street festivals, music events, food tastings, and crafts fairs.

6. FUNDING NON-PROFITS

The overwhelming preference of respondents (72% to 17%) is to continue the current Village policy of not funding non-profits. This represents a clear rejection of the notion that the Council should begin funding non-profits in general and the WYO in particular. The results resolve any ambiguities concerning this issue that may have been present on past Caucus surveys.

Therefore, the Caucus recommends that the Village Council continue its policy of not funding any non-profit community organizations, and the Caucus should discontinue its practice of regularly revisiting this issue.

2005 School Platform

School Platform 1: The School Board should improve communication on District 36 hiring practices for teachers, principals and superintendents. The Caucus recommends the School Board consider communicating topics such as specific job skills and professional experience requirements when possible. The goal of this communication should be to allow interested residents the ability to understand the interviewing process and how information obtained within interviews will be shared and evaluated by District 36 school administration officials and the School Board.

Question 4 of the Schools Survey asked residents to rank their understanding of District 36 hiring practices for teachers, principals and the superintendent. The question offered respondents an "understanding" answer scale of 1 to 5 with 1 defined as "Not Clear" and 5 defined as "Very Clear". "No Opinion" was also offered as an answer choice. The survey results for the District hiring practices of *teachers* found 760 respondents had selected a numeric answer while 512 residents selected "No Opinion" or chose to leave the question blank. If the question was left blank it was tabulated as "No Opinion". Of the 760 residents who answered this question with a numeric ranking, 28% or 216, selected 1 or "Not Clear" as their answer. Additionally, 62% of the respondents selected a numeric ranking of 1, 2 or 3. Only 19%, or 144 respondents, selected a numeric ranking of 5 or "Very Clear". Similar results were found for the understanding of District hiring practices for *principals* and the *superintendent*. For *principals*, 32%, or 252 respondents, selected 1 or "Not Clear" and 66% of residents selected a ranking of 1, 2 or 3. In regards to understanding the District hiring practices for the *superintendent*, 33%, or 252 respondents, also selected 1 or "Not Clear" as their answer and 68% selected 1, 2 or 3 as their answer. Therefore, it is the opinion of the Caucus that the results from question 4 clearly support the need for better communication within the area of hiring practices.

School Platform 2: The Caucus recommends the Board of Education proactively and transparently communicate the following prior to moving forward with any future funding referendums: (i) The Board's fiscal strategies and options for the next three to five years; (ii) The District's performance relative to the measures used by the District to assess the financial well being of our school system; and (iii) The District's compensation and performance review policies and practices.

Results from question 12 of the survey, show over 65% of the respondents believed the stated financial measurement areas used by the Board of Education to gauge the financial well being of our schools were "very important" or "important". In addition, the following measurements were rated as "very important" or "important" by over 80% of respondents: preservation of small class size (84%), on-going maintenance of buildings (81%), competitive teacher compensation (80%) and on-going cost reduction measures (80%). The findings from question 12 show the Board of Education should work diligently to proactively and transparently communicate information on these vital financial topics.

Results from questions 13, 14 and 15 of the Schools Survey point to an interesting paradox now facing the Board of Education. In question 13, 90% of respondents, or 952 residents, confirmed that they agreed with the District 36 philosophy of splitting classes into smaller sections as student classroom numbers approach 25. However, in question 14, 73% of the respondents stated they would prefer classroom sizes in excess of 25 students in order to prevent a property tax increase. Question 15 asked respondents to rank their opinion of the market basket salary review used by the Board of Education during the most recent teacher contract negotiations. An answer rating scale of 1 to 5 was given for this question with 1 defined as a "Very Bad Idea" and 5 defined as a "Very Good Idea". Results show 77%, or 705 respondents, ranked the market basket approach with a score of 4 or 5. However, a significant number of written comments criticized the market basket approach and reflected a lack of clarity regarding the District's compensation decisions. The Caucus believes the best way for the School Board to confront

these paradoxical issues is through clear and specific communication on any and all funding related issues.

School Platform 3: The School Board should continue to improve and expand the District 36 web-site: www.winnetka36.org. Additionally, the School Board should consider enhancing this system so that residents can sign up to receive e-mail notifications pertaining to important issues facing District 36.

Questions 6 through 9 on the Schools Survey focused on the Internet and more specifically on the District 36 web-site: www.winnetka36.org. Results from question number 6 establish that 1104 or 87% of the respondents have access to the Internet. However, results from question 7 show that over half the respondents, 54% or 681 residents have never visited the District 36 web-site. Question 8 asked respondents to evaluate the effectiveness of the District web-site and the results show that 5% or 18 respondents rated the District 36 web-site as "Outstanding", 48% or 191 selected "Good" as their rating, 28% or 114 choose "Average", 17% or 67 people answered "Needs Improvement" and 3% or 11 people found the District 36 web-site to be "Poor". Question 9 asked residents if they would like to receive e-mail notices pertaining to important issues facing District 36 and 50% or 476 respondents answered yes while the others answered no or left the question blank. Therefore, the results from questions 6 through 9 were a bit of a mixed bag. Clearly the Internet and District 36 web-site are a valuable communications resource. The School Board should continue to put time and resources into its web-site and should consider a system that can send out e-mail notifications to those who wish to receive them.

School Platform 4: The Caucus recommends that the School Board continue its efforts to enhance and improve foreign language curriculum and differentiated gifted student curriculum. The Caucus recognizes the School Board has made improvements within these two areas over the past year and, therefore, offers this platform to support and encourage the continuing efforts to refine and improve foreign language curriculum and differentiated gifted student curriculum.

Question 10 of the Schools Survey asked respondents to rate District 36 grade school curriculum in 11 different areas; question 11 asked residents to rank the same 11 curriculum areas at Skokie and Washburne schools. The 11 curriculum areas were math, reading, writing, science, social studies, art, foreign language, music, kinetic wellness, special needs and gifted programs. Respondents were able to rate the 11 specified curriculum areas through the use of a 1 to 5 answer scale with 1 defined as "Very Dissatisfied" and 5 defined as "Very Satisfied". No opinion was also offered as an answer choice. The results from these 2 questions show a very high satisfaction rate for District 36 curriculum. Of those who gave a numeric response, results in both question 10 and 11 found foreign language and gifted programs to have the lowest satisfaction levels of 11 specified curriculum areas. In question 10, 44% or 229 people, rated the grade school foreign language curriculum at 1, 2 or 3 (i.e. 1 = very dissatisfied) and 50% or 149 people, rated the gifted program at 1, 2 or 3. The results were slightly better in question 11, where 39%, or 151 respondents, ranked the foreign language curriculum with a 1, 2 or 3 and 43%, or 92 respondents, ranked the gifted program with a 1, 2 or 3. The results for all of the other curriculum categories in both questions 10 and 11 were significantly higher. Although the survey results for foreign language and gifted programs do not show high levels of dissatisfaction, they do support the need for continued efforts at improvement.

2005 Winnetka/Northfield Public Library District Platform

Introduction

The Library Board of Trustees and administrative management continue to meet the major library needs of residents of both villages and, for that, the Caucus congratulates and thanks both our elected/appointed officials and the library staff.

Looking to the future, the Caucus emphasizes the importance of continuing to manage fiscal affairs conservatively, while enabling the Library District to maintain its high level of service to the community.

With an eye toward further improvements in library services, respondents to the 2005 Caucus Survey identified the following issues as the Library District's highest priorities:

- Adding summer Sunday hours, from 1:00-5:00
- Expanding the DVD collection of classic and non-fiction categories
- Increasing audio books (books-on-tape and CD books)
- Acquiring a larger supply of seven-day books (recent releases of popular fiction, often bestsellers)

Subsequent to the April 5 referendum, the Library Board and management took steps to satisfy the public's desire for the above enhancements in library operations.

Recommendations

1. The Library Board should improve awareness of the libraries and the library service offerings.

The most important request from the respondents from both villages is to improve residents' awareness of library services offered as well as how to access/utilize these services. This request is a perennial, having appeared as a main plank of the Library Caucus platforms in all five of the past five years. Two-thirds of respondents did not know about seven of the nine library services that were asked about in this year's survey. Of the service offerings respondents were not aware of, 76% of respondents will begin to try some of the offerings now that residents know the services are available.

The Library Caucus believes that the libraries can provide significant community value by taking additional actions to raise the awareness of library information services. In the open-ended survey questions, many of our residents suggested creative, detailed plans of action. The proposed tactics that were found particularly worth considering include:

- a. **Bookmarks – multiple forms for each service offering or “how to”**
- b. **Posters/signage – located within the library at doors, checkout and computers**
- c. **Postcards – gentle, simple reminders with rotating service offerings described**
- d. **Articles in the *Winnetka Talk*, *The Source*, local school newsletters**
- e. **Development of an e-mail communications program**
- f. **Examine possibility of seeking volunteer talent within our resident-base who have the time, skills and interest to shoulder much of the public relations, school connections and media activity that can pay off for our libraries in terms of a higher, positive profile**

Many of these creative ideas can be tried by the libraries with little risk in terms of commitment of either staff time or financial resources. We encourage the Library Board to be energetic and innovative in trying new approaches.

2. The Caucus recommends the Library Board improve the atmosphere of the Winnetka Main library

Again answering the Caucus Survey, respondents judged it desirable to improve the ambience of the Winnetka main library. A peaceful, cozy reading area - perhaps in the "Quiet Study Room" - with improved lighting and more comfortable chairs would help to improve the library experience and increase frequency of visits. Free coffee service, similar to that in the Northfield branch library, would be nice but is not a must.

2005 Parks Platform

The Caucus Parks Committee thanks all of the residents for their answers to the 2005 survey and for the many comments written by the residents.

CERTAIN SURVEY RESULTS NOT LEADING TO PLATFORM INCLUSION

On the question regarding whether residents favored the Park District purchasing beachfront property at 261 Sheridan Road, 362 households favored the purchase, 884 households did not. In September the Park District Board voted not to pursue that purchase.

Responding to the question of using Park District funds to provide more flowers and decorative landscaping to parks that were mainly grass, 529 households favored the idea, 718 households did not. Some residents made the interesting suggestion that the Park District should consider permitting local garden clubs to pursue planting projects in some parks. Currently that is done in Dwyer Park behind the Post Office.

The survey contained a section asking what, if any, additional facilities or activities residents strongly desired the Park District to provide. The overwhelming majority of the 1,374 responding households left that response space blank indicating no such desires. 135 households wanted a pool, 25 households wanted some type of recreation center and 22 households desired construction for a second sheet of indoor ice.

THE FOLLOWING IS THE 2005 CAUCUS PARKS PLATFORM

1. As favored by 1,206 households and opposed by 66 households:

Before proceeding with the garage/ service center and other future capital projects, the Winnetka Park District should publicize details of the proposed plans, any alternatives and costs, and source of funds, prior to holding a public hearing.

2. Regarding the question of augmenting golf user fees with Park District reserves and/or tax revenues for capital needs for the golf course, 620 households were in favor and 545 households were opposed. The golf course has pressing capital needs including a new irrigation system. Based on these factors, the platform is:

For a trial period, golf user fees should be augmented with Park District reserves and tax revenues for capital needs of the golf course while trying to build golf course income and being careful with operating costs and with due regard for other Park District needs.

3. The response to the Park District undertaking a study for a privately funded fenced area in one of its parks for dog owners in Winnetka to exercise their dogs off-leash in the winter months was 704 households in favor and 517 households opposed. With that result, the following is the proposed platform on that subject:

The Park District should study the desirability and feasibility of a privately funded fenced area in a park for dog owners in Winnetka to exercise their dogs off-leash in the winter, and in that study give due regard for neighboring home owners.