

The Winnetka Caucus: A Citizen's Guide

What Is the Winnetka Caucus System?

- The Caucus is a **participatory form of self-government** for the Village of Winnetka; it is a system designed to involve **all** residents of the Village in matters of village government.
- “Caucus” is defined, in the Random House Dictionary, as “a meeting of the local members of an organization or political party to **nominate candidates and determine policy.**”
- **Formed in 1915 to maintain citizen control** over the Village's destiny, its importance is felt by all Winnetkans. The Caucus seeks to **develop consensus** among residents on village policies and candidates.
- After 90 years, the Caucus is still a **strong forum for defining and developing platforms** on current issues and **selecting the candidates** for the Village Council and School, Library and Park Boards.
- The Caucus is supported by **voluntary contributions** from residents and Winnetka businesses.

Who Makes Up the Caucus?

- **All Winnetka residents of voting age** make up the Winnetka Caucus. And those who **attend** --- and **vote** at--- the spring and winter town meetings have the greatest impact on platforms and candidates.
- The Caucus is represented by the **Caucus Council**, which is comprised of approximately **72 volunteers** from the community (four from each of the 17 voting precincts). There are also four at-large members who are not Village residents, but who live within the Library, Park or School Districts.
- These Caucus Council members serve **two- or three-year terms**. Terms are staggered so that approximately half of the Council is replaced each year.
- ***Serving on the Caucus Council is an honor. Those who serve contribute to civic life by maintaining and improving upon our 90-year legacy of selfgovernment.***

What Does the Caucus Council Do?

The Council's two main functions are:

1. **to develop platforms that reflect residents’ views and opinions; and**
2. **to nominate qualified candidates to serve on the Village Council and the Park, Library and School Boards.**

The process by which the Council accomplishes these functions is to **annually survey residents** regarding key issues that affect the Village. As well, the Caucus **seeks to identify residents interested in serving** on the Village Council and the Park, Library and School Boards. The Village, Parks, Schools and Library Committees do this work, as follows:

Develop Platforms:

- a. Interview current Village Council and Board members, as well as staff members and other parties, to develop survey topics;
- b. Develop and distribute an annual survey to all village households;
- c. Tabulate and interpret the results;
- d. Provide policy direction, based on those results, in the form of platforms for the Village Council and the School, Park and Library Boards.

Select Candidates:

- a. Identify, interview and recommend qualified residents to fill positions on the Village Council and School, Park and Library Boards.
- b. **Proposed candidates and platforms are submitted to the Caucus Council** for discussion and approval. The approved slate of candidates and platforms are brought before the Winnetka Caucus for final approval at the **Winter Town Meeting**
- c. **All Village residents are encouraged to attend this Town Meeting, for it is here that the final vote on candidate and platform matters is taken. The community has final approval.**

How Can You Become Involved?

PARTICIPATE!

Since the Caucus is a **village-wide participatory form of government**, it functions best when a maximum number of citizens are involved. The Caucus needs **YOU** to:

- **Fill out the annual survey** - In the early fall, a survey is sent to every village household. The survey asks questions about current village issues. It also asks for names of residents who may be interested in applying and interviewing to serve on the Village Council or Boards. Survey responses can lead to platform recommendations, which become Village policy. **Your opinions matter!**
- **Attend the two Town Meetings** – Every voting-age resident of Winnetka and the at-large districts can be an active member of the Caucus, having the right to speak and vote at the Town Meetings. All residents who attend the two Town Meetings and vote on the candidate endorsements and platforms, constitute the active Caucus membership. **Make your vote count!** Participate at the Town Meetings!
- **Attend Caucus Council open meetings** – Meetings of the Caucus Council are open to residents. Attendance increases awareness of issues and knowledge of how the Caucus Council functions.
- **Volunteer to serve on the Caucus Council** – Serving is a great way to ensure the future and continued vitality of our community. Four representatives from each of Winnetka's 17 precincts, plus four members-at-large, serve two- or three-year terms. If you have not served, or would like to serve again, **contact one of your precinct's current Council Members** or **write your name on the annual survey**. You may also contact us via our website: www.winnetkacaucus.org.

- **Submit your name, or that of a resident you feel is qualified, to serve on the Village Council or one of the three Boards** - Residents are encouraged to volunteer to serve on the Village Council or the School, Park and Library Boards. Village Trustees serve two-year terms. The other Board members serve four-year terms. Each nominee is contacted and invited to submit an application.
- **Attend Village Council and Board Meetings** - Residents are encouraged to attend the meetings. Meetings may also be available on local television. For information refer to the following:
 - **Village Council** - www.villageofwinnetka.org
 - **School Board** – www.winnetka36.org
 - **Park Board** – www.winpark.org
 - **Library Board** – www.wpld.library.com

Specifics: How Does the Caucus Council Work?

Each Caucus Council member (except Executive Committee members) serves a two- or three-year term on one of the **Major Committees**. Each member also serves on a **Standing Committee**. After completing one year, the member may change committees.

Major Committees:

- The four Major Committees - Village, Schools, Parks and Library – identify and interview residents interested in serving on the Village Council and Boards and compile a recommended slate of candidates.
- The four Major Committees develop a survey that polls all households on their opinions regarding key issues affecting the Village. These issues vary from year to year. The committees analyze the results and incorporate these findings into proposed platforms. These platforms and the slates of candidates are presented for a vote at the Winter Town Meeting.

Standing Committees

- Caucus Council members also serve on one Standing Committee. These Committees are Rules, Communications, Finance and New Trier Township High School Caucus Nominators. This last committee selects Winnetka delegates to serve on the New Trier Caucus, which in turn interviews and slates candidates for the New Trier School Board.

How Is the Caucus Council Organized?

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: An Executive Committee oversees and supports the work of the Caucus Council, including Major Committees and Standing Committees. Executive Committee members serve one-year terms.

Executive Committee positions are:

- **Chair** - Oversees the Executive Committee, corresponds with Caucus members, conducts Caucus and Town Meetings and serves as spokesperson for the Caucus.

- **Vice-Chair** - Aids the Chair, oversees Caucus membership development and chairs the New Trier Township High School Caucus Nominators Standing Committee.
- **Secretary** - Keeps records and minutes, is responsible for distributing materials to Caucus members.
- **Treasurer** -Maintains all financial records, including the financial reports. Chairs the Finance Committee.
- **Village, Schools, Parks and Library Chairs** – Oversee the activities of each Major Committee.
- **Communications, Rules, Finance and New Trier Township High School Caucus Nominators Chairs** - Oversee the activities of each Standing Committee.

DUTIES OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Major Committees

The four Major Committees recommend candidates to the full Caucus Council to be considered as the Caucus Slate for the general election. They also submit platform statements to the full Caucus Council that reflect a consensus of the village residents as reflected on the survey. In addition:

- They attend Village Council and Board meetings;
- Interview Village Trustees and Board members, staff, and other parties to determine key issues and criteria to be considered when selecting candidates;
- Draft survey questions and platforms; and
- Interview and evaluate possible candidates.

Candidate Selection

The activities relating to candidate selection are generally as follows:

- **February/March** – Attend Caucus organizational meetings, select project assignments and discuss other responsibilities.
- **June/July/August** – Solicit and identify candidates and refer to previous contact lists for potential candidates. Develop criteria for evaluating candidates.
- **August through November** - Complete evaluation process. Interview every resident who submits an application. Hold final interviews and make recommendations for candidates and alternates.
- **October/November** - Present candidate recommendations to Executive Committee.
- **November** - Present recommendations to full Caucus Council.
- **December or January** - Present candidate recommendations at the Winter Town Meeting

Platform Development

The activities relating to the annual survey and platforms are generally as follows:

- **March** - Develop and refine 3 or 4 major areas of focus for the survey. Begin to evaluate issues through interviews, discussion, and attendance at Board or Village Council meetings.

- **April/May** - Continue investigation into issues and begin to formulate questions for survey.
- **June/July/August** - Submit proposed questions for survey to Executive Committee for review.
- **Early September** – Release survey to community
- **September/October** – Tabulate responses to survey and formulate platform statements.
- **October/November** - Present platform statements to Caucus Executive Committee. Present platform statements to full Caucus Council.
- **December or January** - Present platform statements at winter Town Meeting.

Standing Committees

In addition to the Major Committees, each Caucus Council member serves on one of four Standing Committees. A description of each Committee follows:

- **Finance** – Solicits donations from residents and local businesses to meet all expenses of the Caucus Council. (The Caucus receives no tax revenue or government funds.) Maintains the financial records of the Caucus Council.
- **Rules** – Oversees and amends the Rules, Policies and Procedures of the Caucus Council. Amendments are presented to the full Caucus Council for approval. Oversees the legal filing requirements of the candidates’ petitions.
- **Communications** – Responsible for publicity, including website maintenance. Oversees the Town Meeting mailings, as well as printing and distribution of the annual survey.
- **New Trier Township High School Caucus Nominators** – In even- numbered years, nominates Winnetka delegates to the New Trier Township High School Caucus, which nominates candidates for the New Trier High School Board.

What Are the Benefits of Serving on the Caucus Council?

By serving Winnetka on the Caucus Council, you will:

- Play an **active and influential role** in **developing platforms** for and **assessing candidates** to serve on the Village Council and the Park, School and Library Boards.
- Play an **interactive role** with your neighbors, while gaining knowledge of how your Village government works.
- Feel a **sense of honor** and a **sense of pride** in determining the needs, and thereby **influencing the future**, of your community.

Please Provide Financial Support

The Winnetka Caucus is an independent organization that **relies solely on voluntary contributions**. It receives no tax dollars or government funds. Donations to the Caucus make possible the annual survey, Town Meetings and Caucus website. Expense are comprised of

printing, postage and other operating costs. The Caucus Council is staffed entirely by **volunteers**.

Please make a generous donation and **help the Winnetka Caucus continue to serve** our community. Please send your check, today, to:

The Winnetka Caucus Council
P.O. Box 311
Winnetka, IL 60093