

1 **GREENBURGH CAMPAIGN FINANCE COMMISSION**
2 **MEETING MINUTES – FEBRUARY 3, 2000**
3 **(approved March 2, 2000)**
4

5 Present:

6 Jo Brill, Elizabeth Daniel, Paul Feiner, Andrew Goodman, Catherine Lederer-Plaskett, Claire Lee,
7 Harriet Leib, Erin Malloy, Susan Mancuso, Anne Nelson, Rev. Wilbert Preston, Mike Reynolds,
8 Kathleen Rutherford, Ervin Schliefer, Francis Sheehan, Lester Steinman, Mary Tobias, Jim Winer
9

10 Absent:

11 Sally Schaadt, Charlotte Schienberg
12
13

14 The first meeting of the commission was called to order at 10:05am in the Greenburgh Town Hall
15 Conference Room.
16

17 Anne Nelson from the League of Women Voters County Government Committee stated that she would
18 temporarily serve as the facilitator of the meeting. She stated that the membership would elect a chair
19 later in the meeting after becoming better acquainted. She welcomed the attendees, distributed a
20 membership list and fact sheet, and thanked the commission members for volunteering to serve and
21 Supervisor Feiner for bringing together the group to discuss campaign finance reform.
22

23 Anne Nelson introduced Jo Brill, County LWV President, who was active in 1998 advocating Singer
24 Commission campaign finance reform at the County level.
25

26 Jo Brill stated that the membership selection process for the Greenburgh Campaign Finance
27 Commission (GCFC) was similar to that for the Singer Commission, adding that it was an important
28 group because campaign finance reform cannot be expected to trickle down to the local level-- it must
29 bubble up from the bottom, from the local level. She said the members know the local issues best and
30 are best able to determine local needs.
31

32 Anne Nelson then introduced Supervisor Paul Feiner and asked him to explain the commission's
33 charge.
34

35 Supervisor Feiner stressed that the commission is independent and may do what it wants to achieve the
36 goal of making as even a playing field as possible for incumbents and challengers. He wants the
37 commission to propose recommendations by June so that they may appear on the November 2000
38 general election ballot in the form of a referendum. He is concerned about the potential corrupting
39 influence money has on the political process and agreed that reform must bubble up from the local
40 level, not trickle down from federal or state proposals.
41

42 Anne Nelson held up a copy of the 2/7/00 Time magazine article titled "How the little guy gets
43 crushed" and mentioned the article was worthwhile reading.
44

45 Each of the attendees introduced her/himself while referring to the distributed membership list.
46 Supplementary contact information (fax number, e-mail address, etc.) was added to the list as needed.
47 Anne Nelson concluded, saying an updated copy of the membership list will be prepared.
48

49 Anne Nelson introduced Elizabeth Daniel from the Brennan Center for Justice, stating that Ms. Daniel
50 was the successful litigant in recent case.
51

52 Elizabeth Daniel stated that there is no "one size fits all" approach to campaign finance reform. The
53 commission knows local community needs and is best able to determine what campaign issues need to

54 be addressed and what remedies should be considered. She sees her role as a guide through the legal
55 issues relating to campaign finance reform, adding that it does not make sense to recommend
56 something that is unconstitutional and that will keep the town in court trying to defend it. She said a
57 recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, Nixon v. Shrink Missouri Government, looks very promising
58 regarding limiting large campaign contributions, but expenditure limitations still enjoy widespread free
59 speech protections. She said the Nixon case was more promising for campaign finance reform
60 advocates than an earlier landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, Buckley v. Valeo. Ms. Daniel said
61 she will suggest available options but will not dictate remedies. She is not currently familiar with the
62 legal issues surrounding adopting campaign finance reforms at the local level via referendum.
63

64 Copies of the 1998 report by the National Civic League titled "Local Campaign Finance Reform: Case
65 Studies, Innovations and Model Legislation," first edition, were distributed to each attendee.
66

67 Kathleen Rutherford, of the National Civic League's New Politics Program, who was visiting
68 Westchester from Denver to learn about local Campaign Finance Reform efforts, was also introduced.
69

70 Supervisor Feiner interjected that he didn't want his continued presence to give the appearance that the
71 commission is not independent. After Anne Nelson thanked Supervisor Feiner for his help in
72 assembling a great group, Supervisor Feiner left the meeting saying he looked forward to getting the
73 commission's referendum recommendations. Jo Brill and Kathleen Rutherford also left.
74

75 Lester Steinman, Council for the Westchester Municipal Officials Association and Director of the Pace
76 University Municipal Law Resource Center, stated that the town can hold a referendum only if
77 specifically authorized to do so by state law. Before commenting further regarding the propriety of
78 holding a referendum on campaign finance legislation, he said he would conduct additional research.
79

80 Andrew Goodman, an attorney, stated that it is difficult to attract talented people to politics because,
81 after deciding to run, the first thing candidates must do is make fund-raising calls, which is distasteful
82 and a major deterrent to many potential candidates. He said that ethics laws could limit the type of
83 money that could be raised by candidates.
84

85 Mary Tobias, representing the Council of Greenburgh Civic Associations (CGCA), said that the
86 CGCA is very concerned that incumbent candidates accept contributions from developers, their
87 attorneys, and others with business before the town. She also said cable television could do more to
88 promote candidates during elections but currently the rules in Greenburgh are unfair to anyone who is
89 not an incumbent.
90

91 Elizabeth Daniel said that in some of the campaign finance reform models there is limited public
92 funding of campaigns. It is one of the options the group can consider.
93

94 Anne Nelson said that it is not unusual for incumbents to have greater access to the media. The
95 question for the group to decide is to how to make campaigns fair.
96

97 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett agreed that incumbents have access to the press and other such forums and
98 that it is important that any campaign reform service all candidates, that the commission must be
99 careful to avoid pitfalls that cause only one group to be served.
100

101 Mike Reynolds, representing the Right-to-Life party, said that we need to make more information
102 available to the public, perhaps in the form of an in-depth question/answer publication. He said that if
103 the press did its job we wouldn't need campaign finance reform. Cable access television in
104 Greenburgh works against the third-party candidate.
105

106 Claire Lee, Hastings-on-Hudson LWV representative, said that she thought the showing of town
107 meetings was very informative and helpful in educating the public.
108

109 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett, representing the Greenburgh Democrats, said that cable access television
110 programs do not show in all areas of the town. She said that the Hastings-on-Hudson and Dobbs Ferry
111 Village Board meetings, for example, do not play in the unincorporated area. Information distribution
112 via cable is limited. She said the unincorporated area does not receive much information about the
113 villages and the villages do not receive much information about the unincorporated area. She
114 suggested Francis Sheehan explain cable operations further.
115

116 Francis Sheehan, representing the CGCA, said that there are two cable systems in the town. Cable
117 access in Tarrytown is different than cable access in the other five villages and the unincorporated area.
118 In order to show a program in Tarrytown the tape must be physically transported to their cable access
119 studio—there is no linkage via cable. The remaining areas of the town are hard-wired yet do not
120 necessarily show the same programs throughout town, which divides us as a town. He gave an
121 example of two recent Ardsley Village Board meetings which were only shown in Ardsley; the
122 bulletin board was displayed in the unincorporated area.
123

124 Mary Tobias said that unfair cable access practices are a critical concern of the CGCA. She said cable
125 access could be used to great good but is generally used by incumbents for incumbents.
126

127 Francis Sheehan said that cable access television is currently a very poor means for non-incumbent
128 candidates to inform the public about issues.
129

130 Anne Nelson, who does not have cable, asked who regulates cable access television and who funds it?
131

132 Francis Sheehan said that the Town Clerk is in charge of the town's cable access. Although there is an
133 ad hoc cable access committee, it does not have decision-making powers and does not appear to
134 regularly meet. Regarding financing, he explained that Cablevision, the cable franchise holder, is
135 contractually required to pay the town approximately \$50,000 each year for cable equipment. He said
136 the town also receives about \$300,000 in franchise fees each year from Cablevision but that money is
137 placed directly into the general fund.
138

139 Mary Tobias stated that cable access television in Greenburgh is fixable without a referendum.
140

141 Andrew Goodman asked if cable access television was frequently watched.
142

143 Reverend Preston stated that, after his appearance on cable, he was surprised how many people
144 approached him and said they saw him on television. Other attendees who have appeared on cable
145 agreed. There was widespread agreement that the number of cable access television viewers is
146 significant.
147

148 Anne Nelson asked if local issues are discussed on the town's cable access.
149

150 Francis Sheehan said that there are cable access programs hosted by Greenburgh residents, but, having
151 studied the town's programming practices since the last election, he was found the town is increasingly
152 filling the limited show time with programs from Manhattan Cable Access, Brooklyn Cable Access,
153 and elsewhere, boxing out programs from local residents.
154

155 Andrew Goodman said that the group has to be careful not to try to regulate cable access content,
156 which is protected by free speech.
157

158 Andrew Goodman said that the group needs to be narrow in focus but broad in perspective. We should
159 entertain all ideas while staying focused on the charge of the group. He emphasized the need to be
160 open-minded in our data gathering.
161

162 Reverend Preston said that it is important to get ideas from others, to give those not present an
163 opportunity to share their views.
164

165 Anne Nelson suggested meeting with Frank Barry, from the NYC campaign finance board, either in
166 New York City or at one of the commission's meetings. Rachael Leon, Director of Common Cause,
167 could also be invited.
168

169 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that cottage meetings are common in Greenburgh. Commission
170 members could use the small gatherings to obtain suggestions.
171

172 Harriet Leib said that if we hold general meetings the commission must be prepared with ideas because
173 we are on a tight deadline. We have to maximize the use of our time, she said.
174

175 Mary Tobias will contact Danny Gold, CGCA chair, regarding soliciting suggestions from other
176 members and will try to get 5 or 6 civic association presidents to attend a subsequent meeting.
177

178 Reverend Preston said that meetings are good but we need to motivate the public to attend, that a crisis
179 is needed to get the public's interest, otherwise there is apathy. He said that, during the last election,
180 less than 50% of his parishioners responded when he asked how many were registered to vote.
181

182 Anne Nelson said that voter apathy is a crisis and that it appears the commission, in addition to finance
183 reform, needs to find ways to change people's mindset, to reassure them that their votes really do
184 count.
185

186 Anne Nelson said that the next order of business was to elect a chair, and then removed herself from
187 consideration. Mary Tobias nominated Reverend Preston, who declined due to time-constraints.
188 Harriet Leib was then nominated and seconded. She accepted provided there was a co-chair because
189 she has many other commitments through July. Catherine Lederer-Plaskett agreed to co-chair the
190 commission. There were no other volunteers. Ms. Lederer-Plaskett was nominated and seconded.
191 Ms. Nelson asked if there were any objections to the nominations and, there being none, she moved the
192 nominations by acclamation.
193

194 Co-chair Harriet Leib said that we only have until the end of June to complete the commission's work.
195 Before proceeding further, she asked that the next meeting be set. Issues were raised regarding how
196 often the commission should meet, how often the commission needs to meet, and how often the
197 members were willing to meet. The consensus was that, due to the tight deadline, the commission
198 needs to meet in two weeks.
199

200 Co-chair Catherine Lederer-Plaskett asked for a volunteer to call New York City Campaign Finance
201 Committee member Frank Berry. Anne Nelson will notify him of the date/time/place of the next
202 meeting.
203

204 Co-chair Catherine Lederer-Plaskett asked if members have a preference regarding day or evening
205 meetings.
206

207 Lester Steinman said that 10am meetings are difficult for those taking off time from work, that the
208 8:30am time set for the meeting that was cancelled due to snow was better for him.
209

210 Andrew Goodman said that evening hours tend to conflict with other already-scheduled meetings.
211

212 Anne Nelson said that evening meetings also tend to cause greater conflict with members' personal
213 lives.
214

215 Anne Nelson said that the Town Hall conference room is a difficult room for a meeting, particularly if
216 guests are being invited. She described the effort needed in assembling the table extension and chairs
217 necessary for the meeting. Others mentioned the lack of heat.
218

219 A general discussion centered on where to hold the next meeting. Pace University was suggested.
220 Lester Steinman said that he would explore the possibility of meeting at Pace but was concerned about
221 holding the meeting in White Plains since the commission was focused on the Town of Greenburgh. A
222 suggestion was made to meet at Reverend Preston's church. It was decided, rather than routinely
223 impose on Reverend Preston, that Pace University would be explored first, saving Reverend Preston's
224 facilities for a community outreach meeting.
225

226 Francis Sheehan asked if, before the meeting ended, he could comment regarding a letter he wrote in
227 preparation for the January 26, 2000 meeting. He said that he was relieved that the commission was
228 addressing true campaign reform issues because the only reform mentioned in newspaper articles about
229 the commission involved a question/answer publication, which he felt was not finance reform. He
230 distributed to each member a copy of the letter which he said contains two proposals to consider
231 regarding campaign finance reform. He said that he was encouraged that the newspaper coverage was
232 inaccurate—that true campaign finance reform is being considered.
233

234 Anne Nelson welcomed others to make similar suggestions, adding that she was unaware of the
235 newspaper articles and did not authorize them.
236

237 Co-chair Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that someone needs to be secretary and nominated Francis
238 Sheehan, who agreed provided fellow CGCA representative Mary Tobias assists with recording the
239 minutes. Mary Tobias agreed provided her involvement was limited to providing assistance in taking
240 minutes because she no longer has access to a computer and does not want to serve as secretary.
241 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett asked if anyone else wanted to be secretary, and there were no volunteers.
242 Without objection, Francis Sheehan will serve as secretary and Mary Tobias will help record the
243 minutes.
244

245 The next meeting will be held February 18, 2000, at 8:30am, at Pace University if available, otherwise
246 large tables and chairs will be setup in the Town Hall auditorium.
247

248 Meeting adjourned at 11:50am.
249
250

251 Respectfully submitted,
252 Francis Sheehan, Commission Secretary