

1 **GREENBURGH CAMPAIGN FINANCE COMMISSION**
2 **MEETING MINUTES-- FEBRUARY 18, 2000**
3 **(approved March 02, 2000)**
4

5 Present:

6 Jo Brill, Andrew Goodman, Catherine Lederer-Plaskett, Claire Lee, Harriet Leib, Erin Malloy, Susan
7 Mancuso, Amy Paulin (invited guest), Rev. Wilbert Preston, William Pohlmann (for Sally Schaadt),
8 Mike Reynolds, Ervin Schliefer, Francis Sheehan, Lester Steinman, Mary Tobias
9

10 Absent:

11 Sally Schaadt, Charlotte Schienberg
12
13

14 The second meeting of the commission was called to order at 8:35am in room 208 at Pace University,
15 1 Martine Avenue, White Plains. Various handouts were distributed. Draft February 3, 2000 meeting
16 minutes were also distributed.
17

18 Co-chairs Catherine Lederer-Plaskett and Harriet Leib welcomed the attendees.
19

20 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett distributed an agenda and said approval of the February 3 minutes will be
21 postponed so members have an opportunity to review them, adding that in the future the minutes will
22 be sent in advance of subsequent meetings.
23

24 Harriet Leib introduced Amy Paulin, a member of Westchester County's Singer Commission which
25 studied county-wide campaign finance reform.
26

27 Amy Paulin said that there is a real need for campaign reform and cited as examples: the 1991 Ferrick
28 Commission which highlighted abuses (e.g., involving Playland), common fund-raising practices in
29 Westchester, the Dunn/Spano Campaign for County Executive, and the cost of County Legislator races
30 which has reached \$50,000 for an open seat and exceeded \$100,000 for a challenged seat.
31

32 Ms. Paulin outlined how Westchester County's Singer Commission was created, beginning with (then)
33 County Executive Andrew O'Rourke's proposed legislation in 1994 to establish a commission. By
34 Fall 1995 the County Board of Legislators approved the Singer Commission and by June 1996
35 members of the commission were appointed, charged with submitting a report approximately ten
36 months later. Meetings began in July 1996. All parties were represented except the Conservative
37 party, which chose not to participate. The Singer Commission submitted its report to the County
38 Board of Legislators in April 1997.
39

40 Ms. Paulin said the Singer Commission recommended a non-partisan Westchester Campaign Finance
41 Board be created. It was a key provision and they were proud of the recommended non-partisan
42 composition. However, the County Board of Legislators, believing that it was not possible to create a
43 non-partisan board, changed the proposed Campaign Finance Board to one that would have a
44 bipartisan board with Democratic- and Republican-appointed members. To address the Singer
45 Commission's quest for impartiality, the County Board of Legislators added a provision for an
46 Independent Counsel and approved the legislation, planning for it to appear on the November 1997
47 ballot. The County Executive vetoed it.
48

49 Ms. Paulin said the reason the Westchester campaign reform legislation was defeated was not the
50 addition of the Independent Counsel provision because the legislation was resurrected again without
51 the Independent Counsel provision and it was defeated a second time. The County Board of
52 Legislators wanted the Independent Counsel to report directly to the Campaign Finance Board but the

53 County Executive objected. To get the legislation passed, the Singer Commission went along with the
54 County Executive, recommending removal of the Independent Counsel. The County Board of
55 Legislators, who liked the idea of an Independent Counsel, put the provision back in, approved the
56 legislation, and sent it to the County Executive, who then vetoed it. Remarkably, the County Board of
57 Legislators didn't override the veto even though they had previously approved the legislation with
58 more than enough votes to survive an override. It was voted down by one vote for reasons unrelated to
59 campaign finance reform. The initiative was recently revived for the first time since the veto override
60 defeat.

61
62 Ms. Paulin said the Singer Commission met biweekly, starting July 1996. They were advised that the
63 Supreme Court prohibited spending caps unless there was public financing. It was quickly decided
64 that some form of public campaign finance was needed. The County Clerk and District Attorney
65 offices were excluded from consideration because, according to a September 1996 legal decision, they
66 are considered state offices. The Singer Commission targeted the County Executive and County Board
67 of Legislators seats. They started by examining the NYC Campaign Finance Law, as well as others.
68 The Singer Commission also conducted three outreach meetings. The outreach meetings were poorly
69 attended, however the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) and Common Cause
70 provided input, as did County Legislators and the County Executive. The Singer Commission went
71 over each clause in the NYC law. They looked at fundraising methods throughout the County. Do
72 candidates raise money individually? Does the party raise money for their candidates? The Singer
73 Commission also looked at the soft-money issue. What they found in NYC is that literature can easily
74 be examined to determine if it is candidate-specific and, if so, can be counted as part of a candidate's
75 campaign financing. The Singer Commission also considered the comments and recommendations of
76 outside experts knowledgeable about campaign finance reform. Bob Stern was particularly helpful.
77 He was/is the co-director of the "Center for Government Studies" in California.

78
79 Ms. Paulin emphasized that it is okay to disagree with experts because there is no exact way of doing
80 this type of study. Experts are helpful in giving direction. Andrew Greenblatt from Common Cause
81 was very helpful to the Singer Commission but he is no longer with the group. Blair Horner and
82 Richard Kirsch provided the Singer Commission with some input as well. Ms. Paulin suggested that
83 Nicolle Gordon be interviewed because Ms. Gordon helped the Singer Commission and it would be
84 helpful to find out what she would now recommend, in retrospect, be included in a campaign finance
85 reform law.

86
87 Ms. Paulin said the New York City system encourages small money donations. Initially New York
88 City had 1:1 matching funds. It was later changed to 4:1, \$4 of public money for every \$1 of
89 candidate-raised donations, subject to several limitations.

90
91 Jo Brill said the reason for the increase from 1:1 to 4:1 was bizarre. The finance board didn't ask for
92 the matching funds to jump from 1:1 to 4:1.

93
94 Ms. Paulin said everyone on the Singer Commission worked hard and was in favor of a Westchester
95 Campaign Finance Board after the public hearings were concluded. Even though there was
96 disagreement regarding the preferred number of Campaign Finance Board members, they agreed that
97 an odd number was needed to avoid a stalemate. Five members, similar to the NYC board, was
98 considered. The Singer Commission decided on seven members for the proposed Westchester County
99 Campaign Finance Board.

100
101 Ms. Paulin said that having an Independent Counsel is critical should a local campaign finance board
102 be created. An Independent Counsel is a much fairer choice than having a Town Attorney serve as
103 counsel since a Town Attorney works for a partisan Town Board. The ultimate goal must be to create
104 a fair process.

105
106 Ms. Paulin said a fair campaign finance proposal also requires an independent auditor be appointed.
107 Auditors are critical in making sure the process is fair. Candidates know that their filings are rarely
108 scrutinized by the Board of Elections. Rules are commonly violated. The NYC Campaign Finance
109 Board continues to find violations even though candidates know every filing is scrutinized and error-
110 checking software is distributed to candidates. The auditors are needed so candidates know their books
111 will be examined, and to make sure everyone plays by the rules. It is a matter of fairness to those who
112 do follow the rules. At first everyone is nice and complies, but if one candidate breaks the rules, the
113 other candidates will try to level the field. The auditor protects the system from failing. The Singer
114 Commission recommended a full-time auditor and even recommended a pay scale-- grade 14.
115

116 Ms. Paulin asked and was informed the Greenburgh Town Supervisor is a two-year term. She said, on
117 a two-year cycle, as soon as an election is over, the next campaign begins. All models examined used
118 a two-year cycle. She discussed the cost of having a Campaign Finance Board. In NYC the cost is
119 small compared to the overall NYC budget. The cost of having a Westchester Campaign Finance
120 Board, Independent Counsel, and independent auditors was not a factor in its defeat at the County
121 level. In Greenburgh the staff costs will be the same, an Independent Counsel and an independent
122 auditor is needed. Greenburgh's overall budget is much smaller so how to finance the board is a factor
123 that must be considered.
124

125 Andrew Goodman asked if the county considered forming a board that could be utilized by towns and
126 cities in a cooperative effort to share staff costs.
127

128 Ms. Paulin said that the county had not considered such a proposal.
129

130 Jo Brill said she wanted to deviate from the agenda momentarily to discuss the handouts. The first
131 handout, an October 27, 1997, memo from Yorktown Town Councilman Nicholas Bianco to his Town
132 Board, was a proposal to create a Yorktown Campaign Finance Board. It never passed. Attached was
133 a summary written by Nicholas Bianco highlighting the obstacles he faced. It was written at Jo Brill's
134 request. Another handout contained legislation that actually did pass. It was resolution 74-1998, Act
135 85-1998, involving computerization of financial records. When the commission's recommendation for
136 a Campaign Finance Board was voted down, computerization of campaign financial records was
137 adopted. Many on the Singer Commission thought it was a consolation prize. However, they later
138 realized differently. It was an important step toward increasing disclosure. She added that it is not
139 ideal legislation-- it contains words such as "urge" and "voluntary" throughout.
140

141 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett asked how long the Singer Commission took to develop their
142 recommendations.
143

144 Ms. Paulin said they worked from Summer 1996 to Summer 1997, about ten months.
145

146 Andrew Goodman said any system the Greenburgh commission recommends must be voluntary since
147 the state preempts local regulation in this area. Virtually anything we do must involve voluntary
148 participation, he said.
149

150 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said there were issues during the last election, e.g. cable abuses, that could
151 be addressed at the local level, adding that goals would be discussed later, as listed on the agenda.
152

153 Francis Sheehan asked if members could get a copy of the Singer Commission documents.
154

155 Jo Brill said that she can get members copies but the report is voluminous. She would like to make
156 only as many copies as absolutely necessary due to its size.
157

158 Francis Sheehan said that he did not care about thickness, that he would read the entire document. He
159 said he thought it important since the Singer Commission has been so frequently mentioned.
160

161 William Pohlmann questioned if having an independent Independent Counsel is possible in
162 Greenburgh. He said he is the only Republican at the table and is concerned that the opinions of other
163 groups are being ignored. As the Republican candidate in the last general election against the
164 incumbent Town Supervisor he has many opinions he would like to express about how the process in
165 Greenburgh unfairly discriminates against challengers.
166

167 Ms. Paulin said that Mr. Pohlmann's participation on the commission is critical in developing a fair
168 system. She said that a fair system can be developed, adding that the system in New York City works
169 because the participants want it to work. If a group is appointed to be fair and fair-minded people are
170 appointed, and the Town Supervisor does not influence who the staff is, it will work out, she said.
171

172 William Pohlmann said that the power of the incumbency in Greenburgh includes the use of
173 intimidation. He said he could not get contributions for his campaign because of fear of retribution by
174 incumbents who have been in office for so many years.
175

176 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said she was sorry that Mr. Pohlmann was not present at the last meeting
177 because there was considerable agreement at that meeting that there is a problem that must be
178 addressed and that outreach meetings are needed to solicit opinions from anyone who wants to offer an
179 opinion.
180

181 Mike Reynolds said that he was also a candidate in the last election challenging an incumbent.
182

183 Francis Sheehan said that he was a Democratic primary candidate, challenging Democratic incumbents
184 in office for many years, which was a unique experience.
185

186 Ms. Paulin said primaries are an important part of the election process and must be considered in any
187 reform measure developed.
188

189 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett repeated that it was amazing at the last meeting how much agreement there
190 was that real reform is needed.
191

192 William Pohlmann said that there is an orchestrated effort in Greenburgh against Republicans. He said
193 that Republicans don't stand a chance at the general election. He said that the Council of Greenburgh
194 Civic Associations didn't even hold a debate for the general election because they assumed the election
195 was over after the Democratic primary.
196

197 Francis Sheehan objected to Mr. Pohlmann's characterization of why the Council of Greenburgh Civic
198 Associations did not hold a general election debate, saying it was not accurate.
199

200 William Pohlmann repeated that candidates in Greenburgh don't stand a chance against incumbents
201 and said that even the League of Woman Voters debates worked against challengers.
202

203 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that these issues will be addressed but asked that the group return to
204 the agenda.
205

206 Jo Brill said that she had to leave the meeting early and again referred to the handouts. In addition to
207 those previously mentioned she said there are clippings which she provided for educational purposes.
208 She has many resources, including model campaign finance legislation and the names of contacts.
209 Common Cause's executive director is now Rachel Leon, not Andrew Greenblatt as indicated in one of
210 the handouts.
211

212 Jo Brill said public financing may or may not be right for Greenburgh. Auditing is becoming
213 increasingly important to her. The New York City Campaign Finance Board still finds mistakes and
214 attempts at fraud even though filers know the documents will be examined by the independent auditors
215 and software is given candidates which is designed to catch mistakes. They have a hard time finding
216 auditors in New York City. It takes a special person. The NYC Campaign Finance Board works hard
217 to preserve their independence, which is difficult since they are part of the city's budget process. They
218 do all their audits internally and significant fines have been imposed, eliciting retribution by elected
219 politicians. As an example, Mayor Dinkins received significant fines for campaign violations, then
220 prior to leaving office, he retaliated against a Campaign Finance Board member, denying
221 reappointment.

222
223 Jo Brill said the Singer Commission started out by getting to know each other, deciding how to deal
224 with the press, and holding public hearings.

225
226 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that dealing with the press is on today's agenda.

227
228 Jo Brill said that the mission of this commission is to study campaign finance reform and make
229 recommendations to the Greenburgh Town Board. The *The Scarsdale Inquirer* article is misleading
230 because there is no presupposition about what the commission should recommend. She said she is
231 really excited about the spirit and enthusiasm in the room.

232
233 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett thanked Ms. Brill, adding that Ms. Brill had been very helpful and a
234 significant resource upon which she repeatedly relied while co-chair Harriet Leib was on vacation.

235
236 William Pohlmann asked if Jo Brill would respond to a question about the commission's charge before
237 leaving. He said that the recommendations are going back to the Town board. He doesn't think the
238 recommendations should go back to the Town Board if the commission is to be independent. He
239 questioned why the commission's recommendations to the Town Board should involve voluntary
240 compliance.

241
242 Jo Brill explained that, as Lester Steinman pointed out earlier, voluntary compliance may be required
243 by NYS law which limits what local governments can place on a ballot in the form of a referendum.
244 That limitation is not reflected in the charge-- it is set by state law. She said she is not favoring any
245 particular approach.

246
247 William Pohlmann asked if representatives of the Independence Party and Conservative Party were
248 asked to be members of this commission.

249
250 Jo Brill said they were not invited, that, alternatively, there would be eight parties represented at the
251 table had minor party representatives been invited. She said they also didn't consider the different
252 factions of the Democratic Party. There had to be a limit, she said.

253
254 William Pohlmann said he wasn't criticizing, just asking a question.

255
256 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that, as the draft February 3, 2000, meeting minutes are being proofed,
257 the "press issue" needs to be addressed. She proposed that the entire commission approve press
258 releases before press releases are issued.

259
260 William Pohlmann said that he questions everything Supervisor Feiner does. He thinks he knows why
261 the Supervisor created the commission and how he will exploit it in the press. He will not respond
262 publicly if the commission issues press releases but reserves the right to respond if Supervisor Feiner
263 gives comments to the press.

264

265 Jo Brill said that she has been troubled by the press statements and has spoken to Supervisor Feiner
266 about them. She said that, as part of the initial negotiations with Supervisor Feiner regarding the
267 composition of the commission and its charge, he agreed to let the commission work independently.
268 She recently reminded him of that agreement and again asked that he not make self-serving statements.
269

270 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that press issues have been a major concern since the last meeting.
271

272 William Pohlmann said he commends the co-chairs and Jo Brill for trying to deal with Supervisor
273 Feiner's use of the press, but, nevertheless, must reserve the right to criticize statements if made by the
274 Supervisor. He repeated that he would not respond to statements released by the commission.
275

276 Susan Mancuso said we need to keep politics out of the discussion because there is a very short time
277 period for this commission to do its work. The best thing is to say nothing to the media, to concentrate
278 on getting the work done. Whatever we do must have the utmost integrity.
279

280 Rev. Wilbert Preston agreed. He was surprised the media so quickly obtained his name and called him
281 for a quote. When we are ready, then we can have a press release. He does not want to speak on
282 behalf of the group because quotes become a matter of interpretation.
283

284 Andrew Goodman said he was surprised when he received a call from the press on a Sunday night
285 asking for a quote. We need to decide how to handle press inquiries. Simply saying "no comment"
286 won't work. He suggested having a person to whom the press can be referred, adding that the
287 commission needs to be compliant with the Open Meetings Law.
288

289 Lester Steinman said there is no way to stop someone from speaking to the press if someone wants to
290 do it, but the members are all adults and if the members want the commission to be successful they will
291 work together.
292

293 William Pohlmann said that he wants the commission to work and that is why he won't comment
294 unless the Supervisor initiates the comments.
295

296 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said we all need to do our best to be fair and suggested press statements be
297 issued by the chairs.
298

299 Andrew Goodman agreed and proposed an amendment-- that the meetings be open to the public. If the
300 press wants to know what the commission is doing they can attend the meetings.
301

302 Mike Reynolds agreed with the amendment and stated that any press release be limited to just listing
303 the next meeting time.
304

305 Claire Lee said that if anyone attends they should not be allowed to speak.
306

307 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett disagreed, stating that the work of the commission could be brought to a
308 halt if attendees could interrupt members and speak at will. An agenda must be followed for the
309 commission to timely complete its work.
310

311 Harriet Leib said that there will be public meetings for public comment.
312

313 Lester Steinman said that opening the meeting to the press may result in "half-baked quotes" appearing
314 in the press that will need a response.
315

316 Rev. Wilbert Preston said that the public may also skew what they hear if they are allowed to attend.
317

318 Andrew Goodman said that he is on the commission because he is cynical of government. He would
319 like the meetings open to all.
320

321 Erin Malloy said that the benefits from opening the meetings far outweighs any downside.
322

323 Francis Sheehan said that closing the meetings to the public will only lead to rumors. He said, if the
324 meetings are open, the likelihood is that no one will attend; if the meetings are closed, the public will
325 think the members are trying to hide something. He said he could not support closing the meetings.
326

327 Ervin Schliefer suggested opening the meetings and closing them, if necessary, should attendees get
328 out of hand.
329

330 Mary Tobias supported opening the meetings and suggested listing the meeting dates in the
331 newspaper's "daybook".
332

333 Rev. Wilbert Preston suggested closing the next few meetings until the commission establishes its
334 goals. He said that, based on the considerable feedback he received from his one quote in the
335 newspaper, the meetings might be very-well attended.
336

337 Susan Mancuso asked if the Singer Commission meetings were open to the public.
338

339 Ervin Schliefer said all the meetings were closed. There were no outsiders.
340

341 Susan Mancuso asked if conduct was an issue at the Singer Commission meetings.
342

343 Ervin Schliefer said that, since the Singer Commission meetings were closed, conduct wasn't an issue.
344

345 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett called for a vote. Should the meetings be open to the public. Yes,
346 approved unanimously. Should the next 2-3 meetings be open to the public? Yes, approved with 3
347 opposed. Should speaking at the commission's work sessions be limited to commission members and
348 invited guests? Yes, approved unanimously. Should press statements be issued solely by the chairs?
349 Yes, approved unanimously.
350

351 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that the budget needs to be addressed. She is getting all the bills. A
352 source of funds is needed, otherwise each member will have to contribute for the coffee. She said
353 having the town support the commission financially may be a conflict of interest. There was general
354 agreement with her statement. Ms. Lederer-Plaskett said Kathleen Rutherford might be a source of
355 funds. She asked if there were any objections to having Kathleen Rutherford provide support, to which
356 there were no objections.
357

358 Harriet Leib said that Kathleen Rutherford offered to supply coffee and bagels. She will talk to her
359 about copy costs.
360

361 Mike Reynolds volunteered to supply bagels at future meetings.
362

363 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett asked for suggestions regarding the calendar. 8:30am is not good for
364 invited guests from New York City and some members. She suggested alternating meetings or moving
365 to evenings-only meetings. She also suggested setting several meetings at once. She knows that room
366 availability at Pace University is more limited during the evenings and that parking is problematic.
367

368 Harriet Leib said that she will check space availability at the Rochambeau School, which is on Fisher
369 Avenue in White Plains and used as the headquarters for the League of Women Voters.
370

371 Claire Lee suggested staggering the days.

372
373 Harriet Leib agreed to staggering days and staggering day/evening meetings.
374
375 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that establishing a calendar is directly related to item 3 on the agenda.
376 Time is short. We need to decide how often to meet to accomplish the goals to be established later.
377
378 Andrew Goodman asked if smaller groups would help meet the goals within the timeframe.
379
380 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that smaller groups would be a good idea once the goals are
381 established.
382
383 Andrew Goodman and Lester Steinman said they are looking at relevant preexisting legal issues.
384
385 A discussion ensued, centered on picking the next meeting dates. It was quickly decided that there are
386 no dates when all members can attend-- the goal is to maximize attendance, recognizing perfect
387 attendance was not realistic. It was mentioned that some evenings conflict with Town meetings. All
388 Wednesday evenings are taken by either Town Board or Planning Board meetings. The fourth
389 Thursday is the Zoning Board of Appeals. The third Tuesday is the Council of Greenburgh Civic
390 Associations meeting. Rev. Wilbert Preston said he holds church services Thursday evenings. As a
391 compromise between members wanting early evening meetings and others wanting 8:00pm meetings,
392 it was decided all evening meetings will begin at 7:30pm.
393
394 Harriet Leib suggested the third meeting be held Thursday, March 2, 2000, at 7:30pm at a location to
395 be decided. There were no objections.
396
397 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett suggested the fourth meeting be held Tuesday, March 14, 2000, at 7:30pm
398 at a location to be decided. There were no objections.
399
400 Harriet Leib suggested the fifth meeting be held Thursday, March 30, at 8:30am, at a place to be
401 decided. There were no objections.
402
403 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett next turned the discussion to the committee's goals and asked each member
404 to discuss goals the commission should consider.
405
406 Harriet Leib interjected that this is most important part of the meeting, hearing what each member
407 thinks needs to be addressed.
408
409 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that the voluntary candidate compliance issues were already addressed.
410 She said we don't want to propose anything that is so onerous that candidates can't comply who do not
411 have a party supporting them and are trying to do all the work him/herself. Voluntary contribution
412 limits and changes to the ethics law should be considered. She referred to a recent article regarding an
413 elected official in Port Chester using cable television to make an 11 minutes address while prohibiting
414 an opponent access to cable television. There are also problems with Greenburgh cable access
415 television that needs to be addressed.
416
417 Ervin Schliefer said that he hopes the commission can draft a statute similar to the Singer Commission
418 which is based on the NYC system. If we can do that we have done a fine job. Cable access television
419 issues are secondary.
420
421 William Pohlmann said spending problems must be addressed. The Ethics Law has to have teeth. The
422 power of the incumbency is abused. He said Supervisor Feiner frequently sends out letters to the
423 public solely expressing concern and asking for feedback-- the letters are not issue-specific. The
424 mailings are actually campaign literature. Cable TV is also a major issue. He agrees with Mike
425 Reynolds' statement in the last meeting minutes-- if the press did its job we wouldn't need campaign

426 finance reform. The Town manipulated cable access, playing the debates when the World Series was
427 on. Primary elections raise a whole new set of issues. There should be no dead-time on cable access
428 channels. The print media is also a problem in Greenburgh because they don't cover the elections in
429 any detail. He said commission members sitting at the table didn't know who he was and he was the
430 Republican candidate for Town Supervisor last November. He summarized four issues that need to be
431 addressed: (1) inadequate press coverage of local elections in Greenburgh, (2) an ineffective Ethics
432 Law, (3) abuse of incumbency, including constant use of the Supervisor's office for campaigning, and
433 (4) cable access television abuses.
434

435 Francis Sheehan said that he distributed a memorandum at the last meeting which highlights his
436 concerns regarding the inadequacies of the town's Ethics Law. The memorandum includes
437 suggestions how to revise the law to make it effective. There must be a mechanism for residents to
438 petition the Ethics Board to investigate questionable Town Board actions. Currently, only the Town
439 Board can initiate an inquiry by the Ethics Board. Taking campaign contributions from those having
440 applications before the town or who do business with the town is wrong and needs to be prohibited.
441 Some form of campaign finance reform is needed to encourage small donations and prohibit non-
442 incumbents, who are not covered by the town's Ethics Law, from accepting campaign monies from
443 those doing business with the town. His memo to the commission suggests ways of doing that. There
444 are serious problems with cable access television and that it is used by incumbents against opponents.
445 The Town Board passed a resolution last year limiting cable access by political candidates but it was
446 not enforced against incumbents. The incumbents even scheduled a special "puff piece" about the
447 services the town offers residents to play immediately after each playing of the LWV-sponsored
448 debate. Many believed the incumbents did poorly at the debate and the incumbents' scheduling and
449 use of the tape with them on it clearly showed how incumbent-control of cable doesn't work. He said
450 the incumbents even showed the tape on the eve of the election in violation of their own resolution.
451

452 Mary Tobias said she is not sure about public financing at this point. She said that everyone familiar
453 with cable access television in Greenburgh knows it does not work. Cable needs to be addressed and it
454 can be addressed without a referendum. It is a local problem that can be handled by the Town Board
455 locally if they wanted to. The Ethics Code needs to be changed to prohibit campaign contributions
456 from anyone doing business before the town. However, the Greenburgh Town Board must approve
457 any change to the Ethics Code. It is unlikely the Greenburgh Town Board would vote to change the
458 Ethics Code to prohibit those contributions.
459

460 Susan Mancuso said campaign finance is not the problem-- it creates the problem. Many of the
461 concerns mentioned involve other than financing. Money gives you access, so the commission needs
462 to make sure all candidates are on an even playing field. Revising the Ethics Code will not satisfy all
463 the concerns mentioned-- a separate chapter of Town Law would need to be created.
464

465 Claire Lee said that she agreed to be on the commission because things are so bad that anything the
466 commission can do will only make matters better. She said just improving cable access would be a
467 very significant accomplishment.
468

469 Rev. Wilbert Preston said the power of the incumbency needs to be addressed. The ability to finance a
470 campaign does not equate to the ability to perform in office. The financing is simply a vehicle to get in
471 office. Finance must be looked at. The commission must take the power out of financing a campaign.
472 There should be a policy that all have access to cable, including anyone running for office. If you do
473 not have access to the public, you can't get known. He said he didn't know Mr. Pohlmann was a
474 candidate for Town Supervisor in the last election.
475

476 Erin Malloy said cable access is important, not a side-issue, and campaign financing is critical.
477 Resolving the problems with cable access should not be difficult. She urged the commission not to
478 lose sight of campaign financing issues.
479

480 Andrew Goodman said that he would speak from a practical perspective. The commission needs to
481 finish by June. Since the country was founded, candidates have complained about the power of the
482 incumbency and then, once elected, have used that power to stay in office. The commission can't
483 change that. The commission's title is "Finance Reform" and we should stick to that issue. Having
484 read the materials distributed last time and having listened to Ms. Paulin today, he recognizes our
485 options are limited philosophically and legally. The goals need to be focused, which can be done by
486 the next meeting. Subcommittees should be formed at the next meeting so they can begin their work in
487 March. April should be used for public hearings. Writing the report should commence in May. The
488 report needs to be finalized by June so recommendations can be placed on the November ballot.
489 Financing of campaigns is the critical issue before us and matching contributions might be appropriate.
490

491 Mike Reynolds said the commission should use the work of the Singer commission as a model. He
492 suggested that a candidate's campaign contributions go directly to the Campaign Finance Board
493 instead of the candidate to assure contribution limit compliance and relieve candidates of much of the
494 paperwork. He agreed with Catherine Lederer-Plaskett's earlier comment that requirements should not
495 be so burdensome that third party candidates are discouraged from running. Having the Campaign
496 Finance Board manage the deposits/expenses and filing requirements would allow third party
497 candidates additional time to campaign. He disagrees with comments that cable access is not related to
498 campaign finance. Access to the public via cable access television has a dollar value and, therefore,
499 cable access issues must be addressed. He said Mr. Pohlmann opened a can of worms when he raised
500 the issue of taxpayer-financed mailings by incumbents. What dollar value do you put on incumbents'
501 free mailings?, he asked. It is not realistic to *not* put a dollar value on it-- it is part of the power of the
502 incumbency which needs to be addressed.
503

504 Lester Steinman said he is not a Greenburgh resident. He is on the committee, he believes, because of
505 his legal background. He said it would be a mistake to limit the commission's work and not address
506 the broader issues of campaign finance reform specific to the Town of Greenburgh, issues which can
507 then be applied on a broader scale elsewhere. The commission is not working in a box so it should try
508 to address the real problems facing the town, including cable issues.
509

510 Harriet Leib said she is a resident of the Town of Greenburgh. She said cable access is important and
511 can be tied to limiting spending in campaigns. The county passed legislation prohibiting mailings from
512 incumbents for a certain time period in advance of an election. The commission should look at that
513 legislation. Lobbyists should also be limited in when they can contribute. Most important, she said, is
514 that an oversight group be in place to monitor compliance-- otherwise, anything proposed would be
515 lost.
516

517 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that she agrees with Lester Steinman-- it is an important time to look
518 broadly at Town of Greenburgh issues. She said she is the chair of the town's Antenna Review Board
519 which adopted an ordinance very specific to the town. It won't work elsewhere without modification
520 because it is so specific but it works in Greenburgh because of its specificity. Greenburgh-specific
521 campaign finance reform can also work. This is an opportunity to do so much. To limit it would be
522 contrary to our charge. Subcommittees are a good idea and will be formed at the beginning of the next
523 meeting after topics and grouping are decided.
524

525 Harriet Leib said she hoped to hear from CGCA members at next meeting. Due to the increasing
526 accumulation of snow, she suggested the meeting come to a close.
527

528 Harriet Leib asked how many members would like to go to New York City to visit their Campaign
529 Finance Board. The following volunteered, providing the date selected does not cause a scheduling
530 conflict: Andrew Goodman, Catherine Lederer-Plaskett, Claire Lee, Harriet Leib, Erin Malloy, Rev.
531 Wilbert Preston, Francis Sheehan and Mary Tobias.
532

533 Harriet Leib said at the next meeting subcommittees would be formed to examine the NYC Campaign
534 Finance Board policies, cable access, referendum legalities, and the Ethics Law.
535

536 William Pohlmann asked if the subcommittees were limited to those mentioned.
537

538 Harriet Leib said they were not, that the list is open.
539

540 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett asked anyone with additional subcommittee suggestions to e-mail them to
541 her.
542

543 William Pohlmann said the print media is a major problem. He said cable access can be fixed locally
544 but the print media can't. The print media doesn't cover candidates in any depth.
545

546 Francis Sheehan asked Catherine Lederer-Plaskett what would be the procedure regarding approving
547 the draft February 3, 2000, meeting minutes.
548

549 Catherine Lederer-Plaskett said that members should take them home and look them over for
550 consideration at the next meeting.
551

552 The next meeting is Thursday, March 2, 2000, at 7:30pm. The location will be dependent on space
553 availability.
554

555 The meeting was adjourned at 10:38 pm.
556

557

558 Respectfully submitted,

559 Francis Sheehan, Commission Secretary