

2013 Winnetka Caucus Platforms

Caucus Approved

October 28th 2013

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Village Platform

Proposed Village planks 1 and 2 were not approved by the caucus and have been deleted. For reference they are published as an attachment [#1]. Village plank 3 was passed and is posted below, renumbered as plank 1.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Seventy-six percent (76%) of Caucus Survey respondents expressed support for the Village Council to take a more proactive approach to attracting business to the Village's downtown commercial areas.

When responding to the most important actions to expand and attract additional business, three areas had the significant response levels:

- Reviewing our regulatory/legal requirements and zoning codes: 73% favorable; liberalizing the existing liquor license rules: 68% favorable
- Attracting and expanding various types of businesses: restaurants: 65% favorable; retail shops: 64% favorable; and evening-focused businesses or activities: 53% favorable
- Providing incentives to new and existing merchants: 36% favorable

When responding to increasing height limitations of buildings in downtown areas to higher than their current level of 3.5 stories, 54% of responses were unfavorable.

Village Plank #1:

The Caucus recommends that the Village Council devote attention and take actions to support further commercial development and enhancement of the downtown Winnetka areas including:

- **Review zoning requirements**
- **Create and implement procedures to expedite the regulatory and legal review processes for businesses**
- **Consider liberalizing the liquor license rules**
- **Promote an expanded scope of development to include evening-oriented businesses**

School Platform

During the 2012/13 school year, the School Board engaged in three significant efforts to improve the strategic management of our schools and classroom learning:

- Completion of a 5-year Strategic Plan.
- Financial Analysis by the Board’s Financial Subcommittee.
- Progress towards the 5-year Differentiation Plan to improve teaching strategies in the classroom. The Winnetka Caucus commends the School Board for these planning efforts. The information contained in those plans provides guidance for these platforms, along with the annual Caucus survey results.

School Plank No. 1

Differentiation is a new strategic initiative in the District that “respects the learning needs of all students.” The District is four years into the Five-Year Plan. In response to the statement, “Through differentiation strategies, classroom teachers meet the learning needs of students with varying levels of academic readiness (below grade-level to advanced learners),” only 39% of respondents selected “Agree/Strongly Agree.” Of all responses: 39% “Agree/Strongly Agree;” 20% “Disagree/Strongly Disagree;” 11% “Neutral;” 30% “Don’t Know/No Opinion.” As parents have unique knowledge about how this approach is being executed in classrooms, we analyzed parent perceptions about the initiative. Parents are defined as anyone who has had a child in the District within the past five years. Of parent respondents with an opinion, 37% report dissatisfaction in how the District meets the needs of students with varying levels of academic readiness through differentiation. Caucus believes that because four of ten parents have the perception that students’ academic needs are not adequately met, the effectiveness of the program should be evaluated. In addition, over half of the survey respondents who commented on academic preparation reported dissatisfaction with curriculum quality.

The Winnetka Caucus urges the Board to evaluate and address the effectiveness of differentiation strategies used by classroom teachers to meet the learning needs of students with varying levels of academic readiness.

School Plank No. 2

Currently, the District does not have programs for advanced learners such as pull-out programs, accelerated curriculum, or gifted and talented programming that the other New Trier feeder districts offer. Caucus asked, “Should the District offer programs for advanced learners in addition to current differentiation strategies?” The majority of respondents (51%) said, “Yes,” which is a margin of 2:1 over those who responded “No” (26%). And 23% of respondents (mostly non-parents) reported “No Opinion.”

The Winnetka Caucus urges the Board to offer programs for advanced learners in addition to current differentiation strategies.

School Plank No. 3

Per the District's analysis, from 1998 to 2012 cost per student grew at nearly three times the rate of inflation (cost per student grew at 6.7%, CPI grew at 2.4%). The operating cost per student has grown from \$12,760 in 2005/6 to a budgeted amount for 2013/14 of \$24,324.

On the 2012 Caucus survey, 81% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Board should research and pursue cost control measures. When asked this year to rank select cost control areas, more than 50% of respondents prioritized two areas: 1) Reduce non-classroom staff and 2) Contain staff salaries. Caucus urges the Board to consider resident values and priorities in pursuing cost control measures, but acknowledges that more research and analysis is needed to determine which areas have the most opportunity for cost reduction.

The Winnetka Caucus urges the Board to reduce costs.

School Plank No. 4

Per the District's analysis, cost per student has grown at almost three times the rate of inflation. Property tax growth has matched this cost per student growth rate. The majority of survey respondents (62%) favor reducing the tax burden now. In comments, residents report the concern that such property tax increases reduce the affordability of housing.

In the context of declining or steady enrollment and reserves in excess of 50% of operating budget, the Winnetka Caucus urges the Board to reduce the District 36 tax levy on property owners.

School Plank No. 5

District reserves have been steadily growing since 2005 and now total \$52 million, approximately 104% of the District's operating budget. Board policy is to hold 50% of operating costs in reserves. A recent review of that policy by the Board Financial Subcommittee has recommended retaining this 50% target. Their analysis concludes that the 50% amount, more than \$20 million for this year, is sufficient to handle annual cash flow challenges as well as provide a financial cushion for a range of projected enrollment changes. As reported above, the majority of respondents (62%) favor strategies to reduce the tax burden imposed by the District. The Board needs to evaluate responsible methods to return excess funds, which could include future debt reduction, tax abatement or refunds.

Because reserves are currently in excess of the Board policy target, we urge the Board to responsibly return excess reserve funds to the taxpayers through future debt reduction, tax abatement or refunds.

Parks Platform

The Winnetka Park District (WPD) section of the 2013 Caucus survey focused on user satisfaction with governance, management and communications, outdoor ice skating venues, the bike master plan, the potential for co-development an indoor swimming pool, and the recently implemented key-fob system for facility access.

Value

We asked whether survey respondents receive value from the park district, and whether fees charged (both direct and indirect) are appropriate. A very solid 72% of respondents indicated that they agree or strongly agree that the WPD provides satisfactory value. We also asked about whether direct and indirect user fees are set at appropriate levels. The results of this question were inconclusive, because a significant percentage of respondents indicated that they either do not know or have no opinion on this topic. However, only a small percentage of respondents believe that the fees are either too low or too high.

Communications

Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated satisfaction with communications with respect to major initiatives.

Financial Management and Governance

When asked about financial management, board performance, and communications about finances, 59% responded in agreement or strong agreement with a statement of satisfaction. Although the percentages of disagreement were not high, there were high percentages of responses in the “do not know / no opinion” category.

We asked whether the WPD should develop concise quantitative performance indicators for various programs, 64% indicated agreement while only 12% indicated disagreement.

WPD Platform #1

The WPD should develop and regularly communicate concise quantitative performance indicators for activities that permit such measurement, including all enterprise funds, beaches and Skokie Playfields. The objective of these measures should be to permit the community to obtain a straightforward, tangible and objective view of how well the WPD serves its constituents.

Bike Master Plan

The survey asked three questions that pertain to the bike master plan, which was commenced by the WPD in 2012 and continues to be under discussion. As was the

case in the 2012 survey, this project stands out as a clear mandate. Nearly 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the plan should continue to be developed and implemented, 64% agreed that improved east-west access is needed, and 62% agreed that there is a need for improved safety for cyclists.

WPD Platform #2

The WPD should continue efforts to develop a community bike master plan that includes improved east-west access and focuses on increased biker safety.

Outdoor Ice Skating

The WPD has installed a refrigerated outdoor ice sheet adjacent to the Winnetka Ice Arena, for continued use throughout the winter season. This initiative is partially in response to recent climate changes that have challenged the WPD's ability to maintain natural ice sheets in locations throughout the community. We asked questions centered on anticipated use of the new ice sheet, and whether the WPD should continue its yearly program of preparing ice at three neighborhood locations.

Nearly half of respondents indicated that they planned to use the new refrigerated ice sheet. This is considered a strong response for an activity that serves a small subset of the overall population. More importantly, 56% of respondents indicated that the WPD should continue to prepare the ice sheet at Hubbard Woods Park, and 40% responded favorable to continuation of ice preparation at Indian Hill Park.

WPD Platform #3

WPD should continue to prepare for ice-skating at Hubbard Woods Park and should explore further options to enhance that ice skating venue.

Indoor Swimming Pool

The survey included a number of questions designed to gauge community demand for an indoor swimming facility. The survey framework made clear that: 1) the WPD has not taken any steps in this direction, and 2) that any such facility would likely come about only as a result of a cooperative effort among multiple organizations. The survey results suggest that such a facility would be of benefit to the community, with 45% of respondents indicating that a WPD-cooperative indoor pool would be utilized at least monthly. However, when asked whether the WPD should perform a feasibility study as an initial step down this path, 45% of respondents responded NO, while only 43% responded YES. Due to the lack of clear mandate, no platform has been generated in this regard.

Library Platform

The 2013 Caucus survey questions focused on the importance of library services to Winnetka- Northfield residents, awareness of services, their preferred methods of communication and what content they would like to see on the upcoming redesign of the library website.

Library Usage and Satisfaction

It is clear that the library continues to be an important resource in our community. Usage of library services is high, with 64% of households reporting that they use services offered by the library at least once a month, including almost a third, (32%) reporting that they use the library once a week or more. Just 8% of residents say they have never used the library. Overall satisfaction with the Winnetka-Northfield Public Library is also high; 79% of respondents say they are satisfied with the level of service provided by the library.

Services

The library has introduced many new programs and services in recent years. Many of the new services have become available due to technology advances. Survey questions were asked to determine which services are most important and to provide insight into setting priorities.

Library Service	Importance*
Hi Tech	
Free Wi-Fi	59%
Downloadable books or e-books	57%
Financial databases	42%
Computer training courses	41%
One-on-one computer assistance	40%
High Touch	
Borrow print books	89%
Librarians to help find information	79%
Dedicated children’s space	76%
Quiet areas	72%

Borrow DVDs/CDs	69%
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* Rated very important or somewhat important on a five point scale

Despite the growing popularity of technology-oriented services and programs, the traditional or “high-touch” offerings provided by the library continue to have the highest importance among the community.

Library Plank #1

The Winnetka-Northfield Public Library Board should acknowledge that residents expect the highest levels of service and convenience whether utilizing traditional or newer service offerings. Recognizing that there are limited resources and budgets available, the Board should continue to adapt its service offerings in recognition of technology advancements but should ensure that it maintains a high degree of service related to its more traditional offerings,

Communications

Residents overwhelmingly prefer to get their information about the Winnetka-Northfield Library from the library newsletter, The Source, which is printed and mailed to households quarterly.

Source of Information	Preference
Library quarterly newsletter	72%
Email	52%
Library website	50%
Newspaper calendar of events	22%
Poster/flyers	10%
Library video board	4

Service Awareness

Although many of the newer technology-based services provided by the library have been offered for several years now, for many of the services there is still a lack of awareness among the resident population that these services are provided. In some cases awareness has been growing over time in other cases awareness has remained low.

Service	Awareness 2011	Awareness 2012	Awareness 2013
Free Wi-Fi	62%		82%
Downloadable books	54%		77%
Computer classes	62%		60%
Mobile app		40%	43%
Genealogical research	38%		44%
Free investment services database		31%*	35%
Live chat reference	34%		16%

*Based on highest awareness for Morningstar

Library Plank #2

Communications from the Winnetka-Northfield Public Library Board should:

- **Continue to rely on The Source as the primary vehicle for disseminating information about library offerings to residents.**
- **Consider offering The Source newsletter in electronic form via email to residents.**
- **Make The Source placement on the website more visible.**
- **Continue soliciting email registrations among residents to expand its database.**
- **In light of community acceptance of email communications, consider expanding the options for residents to opt in to receive information via email about library events and services.**
- **Continue to communicate news and information about newer services to increase awareness among the community.**

Library Website

The majority of residents, 74%, have used the library website during the last twelve month period. As the library begins planning its redesign of the website, it should be cognizant of what residents would like to see on the site.

Website Content	Importance*
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Basic Information (hours, location, directions)	89%
Ability to reserve and renew materials	89%
Library catalog	86%
Online databases	79%
Library programs and events	76%
Borrow or download an e-book or e-magazine	70%
Pay fines online	55%
Book reviews and recommendations	54%
Research or homework help	50%
Online card application	47%

* Rated very important or somewhat important on a five point scale

Library Plank #3

During the 2013-2014 redesign of the Winnetka-Northfield Library website the Board should:

- **Maintain current information and services that are important and relevant to the residents**
- **Add new services that can be conducted on the website- e. g. on line card applications.**

Attachment 1 – Village Platform - defeated planks

STORMWATER

Finding a way to improve and pay for our storm water management is the single largest issue facing the Village. Changes in the intensity of rain storms and changes to the housing stock in the last 10-15 years have exacerbated the flooding in low lying parts of the Village and since the 100-year storm in July, 2011; the Village Council has been actively working to find an equitable way to reduce the flooding problems.

In 2012 analysis began on a storm water sewer improvement project, and a proposed solution was approved by the Village Council in May, 2013. The approved project includes construction expenditures of \$41 million that will be funded by Village budget reserves of \$7 million and bond issuance of \$34 million. The bonds will be retired over 30 years with \$30 million in financing costs. This represents \$71 million in total project costs.

The Village has proposed, approved and is proceeding with the creation of a storm water utility. All property owners (residential, commercial, non-profit, etc.) would be subject to a fee assessed on all real estate parcels in the Village based on their number of ERUs (Equivalent Runoff Units). The plan calls for an ERU-based approach that will collect fees over 30 years to repay the \$34 million borrowed for the project. Existing reserves of \$7 million would not be replenished.

In this year's Caucus Council Survey, 76% of respondents agreed that they had a good understanding of storm water-related issues, and 64% agreed they had a good understanding of the storm water solution proposed by the Village.

Respondents were asked about their agreement regarding the proposed Village solution: 42% were in agreement; 31% were in disagreement; and 21% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Regarding the Village proposed approach to paying for the project and its financing costs, 50% of respondents agreed with the proposed storm water utility approach to pay for the project; 32% disagreed; and 14% neither agreed nor disagreed.

All the above questions related to storm water were answered by more than 700 respondents. Comments were made by 174 respondents (24%) and 77 comments stated that homeowners in the flood plain should pay a proportionately higher fee than those not in the flood plain. Nineteen comments said the proposed structure was fair and equitable. Less than a dozen responses questioned the validity of a proposed storm water utility/ERU approach that did not take into account the amount of permeable surface on a parcel or the home owners' efforts to reduce runoff.

PLANK #1:

There is strong support for a solution to our flooding problem, but there is concern

and a lack of clear agreement among residents about the scale and cost of the proposed solution as well as the proposed payment approach.

The Caucus recommends that the Village Council commit to seek immediate increased levels of input from Village residents on its proposed storm water solution, financing and methodology of utility fee payment allocation. Additional attention, review and consideration needs to be given to the allocation of storm water fees including factors based on parcels located in, or not in, a flood-prone neighborhood as well as payment allocation based on lot size, semi-permeable surfaces and flood control actions taken by individual property owners.

REFERENDUM

In 2005 the Winnetka Village Council campaigned for and placed on the ballot a referendum asking residents to approve Home Rule status for the Village. The Trustees stated at that time that it was their intent to seek input from Winnetka residents to issue bonds for any financially significant expenditure as had been done before the adoption of Home Rule.

In 2013 the Village Council approved the Storm Water Management Program and has chosen to fund this project with a combination of \$7 million in reserves and issuance of \$34 million in new bonds. The construction cost is estimated by the Village to be \$41 million and the bond issuance will add an additional \$30 million in financing costs over 30 years – which is one of the largest projects undertaken by the Village.

The 2013 Winnetka Caucus Council Survey asked residents if they believe that an expenditure of the magnitude of the Storm Water Management Project should be approved by village residents in a referendum process.

By a margin of more than two-to-one (62% to 28 %), the Village residents answered in the affirmative.

PLANK # 2

The 2013 Winnetka Caucus Council strongly recommends that the Village Council consider holding a referendum seeking resident approval for funding of any project of significant magnitude, including storm water.