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**2022-2023 MCC Governing Board  
Elections & Nominations Committee  
November 21, 2022 – 6:30 p.m.**

**MINUTES**

**Committee Members Present:** Shivani Saboo, Chair; Ari Ghasemian; Kristina Groennings; Sarah Tran  
**Other Board Members Present:** *virtual:* Barbara Zamora-Appel  
**MCC Staff Present:** Mike Fisher, General Programs Manager; Holly Novak, Exec. Assistant;  
*virtual:* Sabrina Anwah, PIO & Director of Marketing Communications  
**Guests:** None.

**CONVENE MEETING**

MCC Governing Board Treasurer Saboo convened a meeting of Elections & Nominations Committee of the Governing Board of the McLean Community Center on November 21, 2022, at 6:31 p.m. She announced that the meeting was being audio recorded. No changes were requested to the Agenda; it was adopted by acclamation.

**FOCUS: 1. Participation by the public. 2. Integrity of the process. All discussion in this meeting centered on what we are doing or not doing around these two operative aspects of the annual Gov. Board election.**

**REVIEWING DOCUMENTS**

1. MOU (MCC with Fairfax County) was reviewed to note which paragraphs apply to the MCC Governing Board annual election.
2. ENC Policies & Procedures were reviewed and discussed as to the relevance of these guidelines remaining in effect as written for the 2023 Governing Board election.

*Guidance by Chair Saboo:* Some discussions tonight may result in us adjusting these documents. It was agreed to move ahead on the agenda and return to consideration of the governing documents later in the meeting.

**DECISION: ONLINE (ELECTRONIC) VOTING**

Last year the ENC talked about adding electronic voting as method believing it would make voting more accessible for young people. However, not a lot of organizations are comfortable managing online voting fairly. LWV is not trained nor prepared to do so. Even if MCC pursued other options (such as a team at George Mason University) it is not immediately feasible. Moreover, while some online voting platforms exist, it would be difficult to introduce it this year with so much other change happening at MCC (new Executive Director; returning to full programming and operations). Recommendation is to work toward having online voting as a goal for next election cycle – giving us time to research it thoroughly. Chair Saboo also noted that some people didn't want electronic voting ever to happen. There are many diverse opinions throughout the community about this topic.

*Opinion expressed:* I think we definitely should have online voting, but we must be very careful in this climate to vet the provider. That takes time. If you've already looked into it and didn't see any options, it might be worth tabling it until next year to be sure we do it right. Not having the right provider will cause more problems than it's worth.

*Summary by Chair Saboo:* Such big change takes a long time. Every year the election cycle starts early in the year (January). Our committee can start the efforts in support of this goal for next year (2024 election). If we do find a provider, we could run a trial with high schoolers and see how it goes. We will keep this on the agenda for all ENC meetings going forward. Chair Saboo asked if anyone would be willing to take ownership and work on this issue.

**ACTION ITEM:** YES – Ari Ghasemian volunteered to research this matter. He believes from an accessibility point of view it would be important to get this right.

**DECISION: 2023 ELECTION – KEY DATES** \*ENC must ratify all these key dates for the 2023 election cycle.

Key dates for the 2023 Governing Board election shows two scheduled candidate “Meet-and-Greet” occasions and the length of the Absentee Voting period (several weeks). It reflects a recommendation for a one-week time lag between the day people must submit their completed candidate petition and Candidate Orientation happening on the following weekend. This full week gives sufficient time for MCC staff to certify each person’s submitted materials and notify back to them that they have qualified to be a candidate.

**\*LENGTH of Absentee Voting period:**

*Question: When do we get the most absentee votes coming in? If we start in March, how many did we get that early?*

*Clarification by Mike Fisher:* It’s unclear what is ‘normal,’ because last year was not normal. Pandemic in 2020-2021 shifted how voting occurred, as well as MCC’s renovation completion in 2019, and heightened political energy throughout the country. Typically, during the first week absentee voting is open, we get an initial chunk – and then in the last 2-3 weeks, the majority of absentee votes come in (definitely the biggest bulk). In other words, both at the beginning and near the end.

*Question: Why do you want to revisit the length of time for absentee voting?*

**Chair Saboo recalled it was an intense election cycle last year with many concerns in the public eye. Public comments and feedback in several meetings and in media reflected concern about the length of absentee voting in the MCC Governing Board election. To do justice to the public’s concern, we want to have this conversation. If we don’t change anything, we can fairly say that the ENC talked about it and decided to keep it the same... or else, changing the length of time for absentee voting.** However, Chair Saboo also noted that public comment was misguided in questioning why such a long period for absentee voting [perhaps assuming incorrectly and worrying that candidates were being informed about early turnout levels for specific candidates.]

Strong advantage of long absentee voting period: It gives people ample opportunity to give their voice; accessibility = VOTING IS MORE ACCESSIBLE.

Disadvantage of long absentee voting period: Voting early seems lackluster. It’s more beneficial to vote in-person on McLean Day so as to meet each candidate and actually get exposure to who they are and their purpose for running = MORE INFORMED VOTING.

**\*Allowing Absentee Voting all the way up to day before McLean Day – and DELAY final vote-count:**

*Question: It seems long. The oddness of the dates – it’s weird that absentee voting ends three days early on May 17 –before McLean Day. Why not have absentee voting happen all the way up to McLean Day?*

Ms. Novak explained that the League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area goes through a lengthy process (involving scores of hours) to verify affidavits to ensure there is no double-voting and to thoroughly annotate computer printouts that are used at McLean Day to document who has already cast their vote by absentee. This enables the LWV team at McLean Day voting tent to fairly qualify all people who are eligible to vote in-person because they have not already voted absentee.

*Opinion expressed:* I would like to have less confusion for the public: suggesting running absentee voting all the way through and including McLean Day and then sort it out and finish the counting AFTER McLean Day. In real public elections, the last day of early voting usually ends on Monday before Tuesday election day. It’s confusing to try to explain the early deadline to folks. I recommend voting anytime up to McLean Day and then delaying the final sorting and vote-counting.

**Mike Fisher thanked Chair Saboo for considering the public comment. While the public commenter maybe thought the Absentee Voting period was ‘long,’ it’s not clear what is so negative about it. MCC’s objective is public engagement in the MCC Governing Board election; the length of time for absentee voting yields a positive result.**

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*Summary by Chair Saboo:* Based on what happened, the public person's point was that some groups in the community were campaigning robustly organized and were able to take advantage of the long period of absentee voting, whereas other groups were not able to mobilize as quickly. The public person's motivation may have been disappointment. In trying to make the best of her point, the better argument would be that when a resident comes in person to vote at McLean Day, they are more inclined to meet the candidates personally and make a more informed vote.

*Comment by the Governing Board Chair:* The last few election cycles were indeed different; last year was an anomaly. The concern of closing the voting ability so soon in such an unusual year makes sense; but even in other years that are 'normal,' we don't get very many votes. Absentee voting gives people who otherwise would not be able to go to McLean Day an opportunity to vote early. In May, the weather could make it impossible for people to vote in-person on McLean Day. As to the long lead time, it makes sense because some candidates don't start campaigning immediately. There are pluses and minuses for both points of view.

**\*Coordination with candidate Meet-and-Greets (happening in April):** The current practice is that candidates have their orientation and then Absentee Voting officially opens. I make the argument to delay starting Absentee Voting until after the candidate Meet-and-Greets (and offer it for a shorter period of time).

*Comment by Mike Fisher:* **The advantage of having absentee voting already open when you do the Meet-and-Greets is making it easier for the voter to make their decision then and go ahead and vote. If our point is to increase voting numbers and participation, you should have Absentee Voting already available when you host those Meet-and-Greets.** MCC staff has a 2024 calendar meeting next week; we will consider this idea of making changes to the schedule.

*Opinion expressed:* As to the Absentee Voting dates and extending it to the day before McLean Day, it doesn't look like it goes against the ENC Policies & Procedures guidelines.

**\*Recommend earlier processing of Absentee Voting incoming:** We can ask LWV to try to process some incoming absentee ballots earlier (ask about their availability to send a delegation every other week to whittle through what has already been received). We can ask LWV to come to MCC for this pre-sorting a few times before McLean Day.

**\*Concern about careful chain-of-custody of Absentee Voting ballots:** Some public concern was also expressed about opening and handling Absentee Voting ballots/affidavits early. **There is misperception by the public that this allows staff and/or candidates to know the actual early vote numbers count ahead of time, which is not the case.** Ms. Novak clarified LWV process: open envelopes, staple each ballot with the affidavit, alphabetize the affidavits to ensure no duplicates; annotate the printouts of residential addresses, and then separate the affidavits (stored alphabetically); store the ballots to be counted after McLean Day. No counting happens prior to McLean Day. **There is a series of detailed archival videos documenting the chain-of-custody safeguards that were put in place for the 2022 election, out of respect for the public's expressed concerns.**

It was suggested to examine other Fairfax Co. election processes – such as how RestonCC does their vote-counting.

*Summary by Chair Saboo:* It seems like we want to keep the two month window and extend Absentee Voting through the night before McLean Day and then extend the counting to days later.

**ACTION ITEM:** Bring this to the full board and let the public make comments at the Dec. 7 meeting.

## **MARKETING AND OUTREACH EFFORTS FOR 2023 ELECTION**

PIO Sabrina Anwah explained what is done every year. She appreciates receiving feedback from the board for any requested adjustments.

**Phase One (candidate phase):** Winter/Spring Program Guide & website – general notice asking people to serve on

the board. Candidates page on website = key dates; as we roll through the cycle; initial release to media asking people to participate in the election. “Call for Candidates” ad to local media; banner on MCC web page. A legal notice goes out 2<sup>nd</sup> week of January; we utilize our e-newsletters; display ads in local newspapers; outreach to local non-profits & civic groups, to the faith community. Special outreach to high school population through daily announcements, notices in *McLean Highlander* and *Saxon Scope* (at every phase of the election).

Program Guide is not being delivered to all households this year because of a decision by the previous board (paper shortage, sustainability emphasis, printing cost increases). Therefore, we must supplement with two postcards (which were new last year): 1. Be a candidate; 2. Vote early. Postcards display a QR code to request a ballot. Chair Saboo and Ari Ghasemian liked the postcards – it reminded them to get more information. This year’s first postcard will go out in early January 2023.

Phase Two: Announcing Absentee Voting period – advertised through all the means previously mentioned. Candidates have a 100-word statement in the printed ads and expanded statements on MCC website; their e-mail is linked. We encourage people to vote by Absentee Voting or at McLean Day. As McLean Day approaches, we start emphasizing in-person voting. Kyle Corwin develops an ongoing campaign in social media– he won an award in VRPS last year! Video: We want to incorporate more video. Two years ago, youth board members made a video that was sent to the high schools.

Phase Three: Announcing election results: Election results are posted on MCC front entrance doors. Once the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors officially approves the 2023-2024 Board members, we send out a news release.

Suggested improvements: \* *What were your experiences as candidates and how could that have been improved upon?*

*Comment by Youth Board member Sarah Tran*: She heard about being a candidate from reading the MCC news packet and talked to Max Blacksten about it. She didn’t hear much about it beyond that. She did not see it in *Highlander* (may have been a small ad). It was not mentioned on the daily news show at McLean High School.

It’s a good opportunity for our soon-to-be high school Youth Ambassadors – one of the best ways to spread the word is over social media. Our goal is that MCC Youth Ambassadors will help promote the Governing Board election because it gives them better optics to what goes on here at MCC and will help promote youth interest.

*Opinion expressed*: Last year, some 100-word and 350-word candidate statements were not serious and were distracting. PIO Anwah agreed – some candidate statements were long; a 350-word strict limit would be helpful. People didn’t follow the rules. It is clear in the ENC Policies & Procedures – PIO Anwah will enforce it!

*Chair Saboo thanked PIO Anwah for being involved in this meeting tonight and providing helpful background information.*

### **ENC CHAIR’S STATEMENT ABOUT NON-PARTISAN ELECTION**

Last year, there was discontent about how political the MCC Governing Board election became. It is supposed to be a non-partisan election. Over the past three years, it has been very political... then non-political... then very political again. We can’t control what people outside of MCC do. There was a lot of political engagement in 2022; we don’t have any authority to tell them not to bring that into our election because that is their personal right.

Herein is the tension: *How can we really maintain the non-partisan environment in this election?*  
*How can we make sure this remains non-partisan, if at all?*

*Question*: Does the MOU state that it needs to be non-partisan? Yes – in Policies & Procedures Notebook.

*Example explained*: VADF is a good organization involved in the community; locally, they are very important. Chair Saboo was endorsed by them, as were Ari Ghasemian and Kristina Groennings. If Chair Saboo were to run again, she would not approve an endorsement by them. In that year, there wasn’t much political activity; however, it was

very different in 2022 given the slate of people who were running. VADF also has strong ties to people currently on MCC Governing Board – it creates a messy situation. Chair Saboo understood the frustration expressed both by some candidates and the public.

**We can't tell a political group not to endorse people. That is the challenge: it's not just "these people endorse our values." But rather when, by only endorsing three out of ten candidates, it changes the dynamic from being a community player to now being political. That said, if candidates don't participate in the interview process with these types of groups to begin with, then the endorsement is not going to happen.**

**\*recommendation: make the rules clearer to all candidates & require a signature**

*Opinion expressed:* Perhaps print out the rules that the candidates must follow. A lot of candidates did not follow the letter or spirit of what you must abide by. Have them sign a document that they will do their best to maintain a non-partisan energy. Perhaps this would give more accountability.

*Opinions expressed:* You definitely cannot control what outside groups choose to do. And it's not realistic in today's political environment to NOT expect people to be hyper-politically active. The rules were not well communicated last year – one board member was finding out rules as she went along. The perimeter of 40-feet away from MCC building was not explained. Not having a table at MCC events – there was no clarity about that. Having all the rules stated in one place and having candidates acknowledge by e-mail or signature would be helpful to everyone.

It did feel confusing. The school board is technically a non-partisan position; however, you still see tables outside of polling places with Democrats being shown as three particular names on the ballot; our situation is analogous. Is it something to be put into the guidelines: To not seek any political endorsements?

*Comment by Chair Saboo:* I don't think so. Even if everyone signs it, perhaps another candidate could claim: "I didn't ask for or seek an endorsement. The outside group just approached me and offered to provide their endorsement."

*Opinion expressed:* There is also no definition of 'endorsement'. Where is the line?

This discussion came down to three key questions:

1. While we can't control the actions of other people there are certain rules that board members must abide by. The ENC can't get involved in elections and candidates. Perhaps we can have this extend to the whole board. If the board members are required to abide by the same rules as the ENC members, is that O.K.?
2. Many people on the board have family members who are part of these organizations or political groups who push the agenda forward. It's a gray zone because individuals should be allowed to do whatever they want.
3. Can we or should we limit two or more candidates running together as a slate?

Discussing Questions 1 & 2 above: *Opinion expressed:* ENC members are not allowed to endorse candidates nor campaign for other candidates. But there is no extension of that rule to other MCC Governing Board members. It doesn't make sense because in everything we talk about, the board has equal input on. It also creates friction on the board among members if some are campaigning for other candidates. This would be in the ENC control [to make this suggestion]. *Opinion expressed:* I think that is sensible.

Discussing Question 3 above: *Opinion expressed:* I think would be good, but we can't restrict – each candidate needs to run on their own. No "slates." We should think through whether that is a good idea or enforceable or democratic. I'm concerned about obstructing democracy. That sounds like a good work-around to organizations who may try to endorse three people.

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*Opinion expressed:* The correct workaround is: “No coordination.” In general politics, if you are running as a ‘Green Party’ candidate, you are not allowed to coordinate with or link over to another described as a ‘Democratic Party’ candidate(s).

*Question:* Would it extend to the high school candidates, because a lot of them run together?

*Question from Mike Fisher:* I understand about trying to avoid folks campaigning together. But you must ask whether you are penalizing them? Because perhaps one individual may not have a lot of friends and would benefit from grouping together with another candidates?

*Question from Chair Saboo:* Going back to the concept of not letting people run together, how would we enforce it?

You can enforce it if you saw a flier with three people on it: No joint written materials. You could loosely enforce it, but if we institute this, it would involve considerable discussion. I hear what Mike is saying about equitable approach.

*Comment from Sabrina Anwah:* If the political parties are picking slates as they have been (we can’t stop them) it would be a penalization for those who decide to create their own ‘little party’ by linking up – prohibiting it would be unfair to them.

*Comment from Mike Fisher:* One way you could define it is: No joint slogans or more than one person on a flier. But if outside organizations were slinging this type of advertisements, we couldn’t control that. They can do that.

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- SUMMARY: 1. Whether to have the full board abide by the ENC rules.  
2. Whether to have candidates sign a piece of paper to maintain a non-partisan commitment.

We will bring these recommendations to the board and bring up the conversation again to see if anyone else has any ideas.

### CONSIDERATION OF NEW IDEAS FOR 2023 ELECTION

#### **1. DECISION: FEATURE VIDEO ON FAIRFAX COUNTY TV CHANNEL 16**

Fairfax Co. Channel 16 has done some promotional pieces for MCC – Catherine Nesbitt was interviewed for Antique Show and they interviewed Erin Bieger for Touch-a-Truck. The idea is to feature a TV production of current board members in the candidate phase – Why they chose to run for this volunteer position? We would get Channel 16 out here to MCC to set-up interviews with board members.

#### **2. DECISION: CANDIDATE SIGNATURE REQUIRED ON KEY DOCUMENTS (IN CANDIDATE PACKET)**

To be sure that everyone contemplating serving on MCC Governing Board understands the required commitments they will be making to exemplify the values and purpose of the McLean Community Center as an agency of Fairfax County, all candidates will be required give signature that they have read and understood three key documents:

1. MCC “Rules of Conduct” 2. DEIA statement 3. One Fairfax policy. In addition to the Pledge (oath to be taken at June 7 swearing-in ceremony), these materials will be in the candidate packets. A signature page would be submitted by each person (adult /youth) as part of their qualification to be a candidate.

*Comment by Mike Fisher:* Maybe not include the entire policy in the candidate packet but having them acknowledge that this is a core part of what MCC is doing and what the MCC Governing Board will support.

#### **3. DECISION: FUTURE CONSIDERATION OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING METHOD**

Chair Saboo is interested in pursuing “ranked choice” as a voting method for the MCC Governing Board election: instead of voting for three people, you rank all the candidates and every round of counting drops the person of 1<sup>st</sup> place votes and drops the least number of 2<sup>nd</sup> place votes. It has worked well in the recent New York Mayoral race,



to help people express how much they like or dislike a particular candidate. Some people last year campaigned extra hard because they didn't like one particular candidate. It also causes people to become more informed (they must decide how to rank everyone on the ticket). I think this would be good, but do we have an organization that can actually handle that? League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area is our assisting organization; it is unclear whether they are familiar with tabulating "ranked choice" voting.

*Opinion expressed:* The effort is still not finished counting ranked-choice votes in Alaska from last week (election day)!

The following proposed MOTION was delayed until a discussion by the full board about re-ratifying can happen on December 7.

**ACTION ITEM:** Re-ratify the ENC Policies & Procedures after they all decide about it. Put this on the agenda for December 7 Governing Board meeting.

**PROPOSED MOTION:** To affirm that the current ENC Policies & Procedures remain in effect and will be implemented for 2023 MCC Governing Board election.

#### **OLD / NEW BUSINESS**

Chair Saboo asked if there were any other topics for discussion this evening. Nothing was mentioned.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chair Saboo adjourned the meeting at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Holly Novak - Executive Assistant