



Whitemarsh Township Residents Association

P.O. Box 154 Lafayette Hill, PA 19444-0154 610.828.5351 www.WTRA.org

November 2003

In the interest of improving political discourse in Whitemarsh Township and providing useful feedback to the WTRA, candidates and political parties, we recently undertook a post-election survey of our members to find out what people liked and didn't like about the recent political campaigns for Board of Supervisors and School Board. The responses, published below in their entirety, are compelling.

While we make no claim that our survey sample is statistically relevant (the number of respondents totaled 42), we do believe that the opinions expressed are representative of many within the township and therefore worthy of careful consideration by the candidates and leaders of both parties.

We welcome your comments on these survey results. Send your responses to info@wtra.org.

We want to thank everyone who took the time to complete the survey. As always, the WTRA appreciates your comments and suggestions and we will incorporate those that were addressed to us in our planning for the 2005 Board of Supervisors Meet the Candidates Forums and brochure.

Sincerely,

The WTRA Board of Directors

Note: The opinions expressed below are those of individual residents and do not necessarily reflect the views of the WTRA.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Questions:

1. What materials or information did you find most helpful in deciding your vote, e.g., political signage, candidates' home visits, candidates' literature, WTRA Meet the Candidates Brochure, WTRA Candidates Forums, etc.?
2. Were there any aspects of the campaign you would like to see changed in the future? If so, what?
3. Was there anything, positive or negative, that swayed your vote? What were these?

We welcome any other comments or opinions you'd like to express about the campaign.

Answers:

1. The most helpful materials were the home visits, the candidates literature, the WTRA Meet the Candidates brochures and forum. This response applies to the Supervisors. I am unaware of anything other than their own literature for the School Board candidates.
2. I would really appreciate an opportunity to hear and to question the School Board candidates. Perhaps this happened and I am just not aware of it.
3. The background of the Democratic candidates made a very big impression on this household. I was pleased with their responses to the questions at the forums. The woman who moderated the forums did an outstanding job.

Thank you all very much for this extremely important effort for the citizens of Whitemarsh Township.

-
1. Candidate's home visit
 2. I would like to see candidates put the names of their parties on their signs again. The signs are not helpful without their affiliations.
 3. The issue of making Whitemarsh a good place to live was most important to me, especially, the preservation of the environment and green space.

I have no specific answers to questions 1 and 3, but the negative ads, pamphlets, etc. issued by both sides was appalling. Unfortunately, negativism seems to be the rule in today's politics. Very little is devoted to issues.

I was most influenced by the personal response that I got from one of the candidates after I had written a letter to the township expressing my concern about local development.

1. I believe the face time – candidates door-to-door, Candidates Forums and other public events give the best impression of the candidates. I also think that non-partisan production of literature, stating only the candidates' stances on the issues, is better than the stilted offerings by both sides.
 2. I would like to see the campaigns follow the no-negative format more closely. While both sides said that they would not go negative, clearly the last month and week of the race produced four mailings with substantial accusations and negative connotations. Nobody wants to see this, whether it's to your own party or to the entire voting public. Bad-mouthing the opposition doesn't improve the situation and if more debates or forums are needed to identify issues or stances that are in question, maybe the WTRA and other groups could find a way for this to happen. The WTRA should be commended on the forums and the content. While turnout wasn't exceptional, the people who were there most likely did go out and talk to their neighbors. The two forums were well run and produced debate on the issues that probably had an effect on the outcome of the race.
 3. My vote really wasn't swayed one way or the other. I believed in the people I voted for from the spring when candidates announced they were running. I think the negative mailings do have an effect of polarizing the campaign, which is not beneficial to the community. People do see it as a last-ditch effort, specifically when it comes out less than a week before the election.
-

The WTRA booklet and debates were very useful. However, as expected, the debates were often canned responses and almost everyone agreeing with each other. There seemed to be a hint of concern about spending money unnecessarily.

School board: there was no information about the debate held, and my understanding is that the cable access [channel] did not televise the debate. There was virtually no information of value about the School Board election, which is a great loss since the taxes of the school district are large and the impact on the people great.

Literature: I was greatly troubled about the number of pieces of literature received both in the mail and at home that did not have any listing of the group that sent the literature. The WTRA piece that clearly stated that WTRA could not endorse candidates was very good, especially in light of the dirty trick played last election.

Of the negative pieces, the one that perhaps was the best (without taking sides on the rightness or wrongness of the position taken) was the piece that stated that the Democrats were a single-issue team and that there was more to the township than a single issue. The worst single issue piece (negative) was the one from the individual who spelled out his reasons for each candidate, and then "mysteriously" listed all the Republicans as first choices. In all, there were simply too many mailings. The second worst negative mailing was the one arguing that not filing campaign finance documents by that date suggested special interest money from out of state.

Of all the mailings/home distribution, the School Board seemed to be an afterthought.

1. WTRA brochure, candidate's literature.
 2. Personally I do not appreciate surprise residential visits. Candidates should coordinate on a neighborhood level, and have a scheduled open house/forum at a house in the neighborhood. This type of ground zero, synergetic politics would prove fruitful in our township moving collectively forward.
 3. Relative to the candidates, nothing; relative to the growing congestion in our township, yes.
-

Just keep up the standards you've set and I'll be ecstatic

1. Political signage and candidates' home visits. I was unable to attend the WTRA Candidates Forums but I do think the forums are a great idea.
 2. The lines were long but it is to be expected.
 3. Personal notes and it helped to have WTRA reinforce the election with reminders and newsletters. I am also a big advocate of open space so I was looking at the various candidates' platforms.
-

1. The most helpful information by far was the 2nd debate at the firehouse. Political literature can't educate you the same way face-to-face communication does. You could easily tell who cared more about Whitemarsh; propoganda doesn't promote sincerity.
 2. No, I thought it was run in a fair and just manner... unlike Philadelphia!
 3. I went to the 2nd debate with an open mind, trying to seek out the most sincere and caring candidates. I don't vote along party lines, I vote for the best candidates. It appeared from the 2nd debate that the Democrats were more genuine in their efforts to preserve open space and reduce suburban sprawl while the Republicans only wanted to maintain the status quo. I've been in the Township for 36 years and if we allow the status quo to remain, we'll start seeing as many people hit by cars as we see deer hit. You can't safely ride a bicycle on our main streets like we used to. I was swayed by the Democrats' positive ideas and the Republicans' negative sentiments. Normally I'd say that I'd like to see better voter turnout, but with the results the way they were, I'm happy how things turned out.
-

1. WTRA Meet the Candidates Brochure (unable to attend forums) for the Supervisors. I didn't vote for School Board candidates because I didn't have enough information on their individual positions to make educated decisions.

Initially I thought it was wonderful that there were 6 qualified individuals willing to give their time to serve the community as Supervisors. It was very disappointing that there was negative campaigning towards the end of the campaign. I care about issues, but I hate politics (at all levels of government). Party lines get in the way of solving problems.

1. Home visits, candidate literature, WTRA forums very helpful.
 2. Suggest both parties discontinue crowd contact during the parade on July 4th and instead have their float proceed with the rest of the parade and not cause the terrible gaps there were in this past parade. The candidates can have all the crowd contact at Miles Park after the parade.
 3. Tired of "old regime." Want fresh ideas and approaches to our issues. Get action on many of the issues, i.e., green space, traffic, public safety, sidewalks on east end of Germantown Pike from PW High School to Butler Pike where people can walk in safety instead of the turf plots that were given when PennDOT changed and resurfaced the roads some years back. These surfaces have forced people to walk in the street gutter, even women with baby carriages have resorted to walking in the street instead of using the "sidewalks" such as they are now.
-

1. Candidates' home visits. I felt the candidates' literature was very biased and not always true and the WTRA literature didn't help me distinguish the positions enough.
2. I was incensed by the letter from the past president of the WTRA endorsing candidates given that the WTRA doesn't do that. I would have much rather known the WTRA's position. I would be willing to bet the past president was a Republican.. Am I correct???

The school board debate should have been shown on CITV.

The Colonial School District status was conveniently timed to come out right before the elections. Taxpayers' dollars should not be used to provide free publicity to a particular party... and then to say the debates couldn't be taped because it was an [in]appropriate use of taxpayers' dollars.

3. Negatives: The article about a prominent Republican pulling out the signs of Democratic candidates. Marc Orlow deciding that the school board debate shouldn't be shown on CITV because the "taxpayers" don't want their tax dollars used that way. I would suggest that this was a bit self-serving and not at all the case in an election in which there truly were many good candidates from both parties.

Literature sent by a supposedly "non-partisan" group of residents who are all or are predominantly Republican.

And last, but certainly not least, the letter from the past president of the WTRA.

Other: Seemed pretty ugly.

1. We made our decisions concerning the supervisors based on the forums and visits by the candidates. There were a lot of negative mailers sent by the Republicans, which actually discouraged us from voting for them.
2. While I liked the forums, I found their format encouraged sound bites, the quick response rather than thoughtfulness. I'm not sure how that can be changed but perhaps a longer time to respond would help. Also, everyone seemed to jump on the open space bandwagon making it hard for those who hadn't paid close attention to decipher who was really serious about protecting Whitemarsh. It is a shame that the WTRA can't endorse.
3. There was some real nastiness towards the end of the race, which is new to our township. I hope that doesn't happen again.

Thank you very much for all of your hard work.

1. WTRA Brochure and Forum
 2. No changes, really. I liked the formal and understated approach
 3. The overall Republican County negative election campaign encouraged this independent voter to vote the Democratic slate without splitting the vote.
-

I was fortunate to meet one of the Supervisor candidates the week before the election – at a neighborhood event. It was the first time I had an opportunity to speak with him or any of the candidates directly. I found that he was sensitive to critical issues, understood the township and was professionally involved in areas directly related to several key issues. Without the chance to meet and talk with the candidate, I do not know how I would have voted because the literature and e-mails did not distinguish the party positions very clearly.

I believe that in a township of our size, with only a few hundred votes separating the two winners and losers, meeting as many citizens, families and voters as possible is the key to an informed voter and success for that candidate. I know there was a forum and that questions were posed and answered, but my neighbor who "went for me" came back saying very few questions were answered well. Most of the time, they used a scripted answer. Just a thought for the future

I found the website very informative, literature is all biased, can't be used to make a real judgment. I was very upset to learn of the misleading information put out by the Cocoran team, and it cost them my vote.

1. Candidates' visits were the most helpful.
 2. Less signs - they tend to make the area less appealing. Also the number of mailings indicate far too much money was spent.
 3. Lack of good candidates by the Republicans and their failure to offer any new views.
-

1. I found the WTRA Candidates brochure to be the most helpful.
 2. I dislike the fact that it is obvious that the campaign literature contained lies. I would like to make campaign information liable for evaluation (no lies or false statements) before it can be mailed out. I also would like evaluation information like the WTRA Meet the Candidates Brochure available for all the candidates that we are to vote for. Many times I am not sure of the qualification of certain individuals running in the less prominent races (such as judges).
 3. Negative campaigning is something I have very little tolerance for.
-

1. WTRA brochure was helpful for summary & comparing qualifications as is the League of Women Voters insert in the Inquirer, but I found the WTRA Forum most useful because I was able to see how the candidates reacted in a public setting, as they would in BOS or other public meetings.
2. Less signs or none at all - maybe a limit of one per property, with a shorter time frame (after a month they have lost their effectiveness). Maybe a ban on placing them at businesses, since it can be awkward for business owners, and often both parties' signs are displayed (with or without permission), so it is not an endorsement.

Also, I think more advertising for the forum would help to draw in a wider audience. A notice posted in the sign at Miles Park (corner of Joshua & Germantown) and maybe the Colonial would run a public service ad to notify voters. Flyers sent home in students' "Friday folders" in Colonial Schools & St. Philip's would reach the target audience. (If funding allows, of course)

3. I had made my decision before the final round of negative ads were issued from the supporters of Corr, Fumo & DeRosa, though I heard from a few people at the poll that they were swayed to not vote Republican because of the negative campaigning, but I think it is impossible to isolate one aspect of the campaign and identify it as the cause for the outcome, especially since the Brown, Corcoran & Weiss team was better qualified.

Thanks again for all the efforts of the WTRA.

1. Literature, WTRA Candidates Brochure. Definitely not political signage
 2. Moratorium on signage. Additional forums where real issues can be discussed.
 3. Not necessarily, although I was not impressed by the fact that the two Democratic School Board candidates who legitimately won in the primary (who also happen to be Republicans) were not included on literature being passed out at the polls. Not honest.
-

1. We found (and heard from others) that face-to-face meetings with the candidates were very useful as was the WTRA Candidates Forums. The WTRA Meet the Candidates Brochure also was helpful, but for the most part political signage and "junk mail" type literature fell somewhere between annoying and useless.

2. I cannot suggest at this point how it could be implemented, but I would like to see an effort to curtail negative, insulting campaign tactics in future Whitemarsh Township election campaigns. My husband, I, and many people we have chatted with were sincerely upset by this negative tone in campaign literature that was directed to our homes, literature which was full of dire predictions, vague promises and copycat approaches but without solid content. The majority was from the local Republican Party leadership, and it certainly lowered them in our estimation. The election results suggest that many others were impacted the same way and voted their feelings at the polls.
3. We were looking for candidates who were well acquainted with our township, having resided here for a long period of time, who represented the various areas of the township rather than just one neighborhood, who offered personal maturity and a solid record of service to the township. Most of all, we were seeking candidates who could put forth concrete proposals, agendas and/or potential solutions to the actual, current pressing problems facing the township. Candidates who seemed merely to have adopted the proper buzz words and platitudes were not acceptable.

Thanks for the WTRA e-mails concerning the recent elections which were sent out. Your efforts are most appreciated.

1. WTRA Meet the Candidates Brochure, WTRA Candidates Forums
2. There needed to be more time for residents' questions [at the WTRA Candidates Forums] - perhaps at an open mike. Although hearing the candidates' questions of each other as well as their responses was helpful, this could have been compiled and presented in written form prior to the fora. I think a moderator needs to intervene when a candidate is ducking a question or simply doesn't answer it - there should be a mechanism by which the candidate is compelled to be more specific and revealing.
3. Simply more educated answers on the part of the eventual winners of the election.

Other: Per my math, only approximately 5800 voters actually voted on 11/4. I know that the township has about 16,000 residents, many NOT of voting age. However, I am curious about what percentage of local registered voters actually went to the polls. I think someone ought to make an instructive and somewhat critical comment in the local print media that, in an area where educated people reside, there ought to be a significant majority turnout!

1. I am a busy person so I read when I have quiet time. Work and take care of home, husband and three dogs plus...
2. I am not happy with the Colonial School Board. In my opinion, this township spends a lot of money per child with questionable results. My children are grown and I do not have grandchildren yet. Schools buy a lot of gadgets, and are 'looking good' and I am not impressed. The school board needs to focus on more fundamentals. Instead of the kids going home early, how about a study period at the end of the day with teachers and teachers' aides available to assist on one to one. Too much emphasis on sports, which does not improve the process of thought - in my opinion.

We need elected people who are not blinded by the video world and truly wish for our children to be educated. How about interviewing the candidates and digging into their value systems and how they emanate by their actions.

3. I described above how I feel about the Colonial School Board. As for the others, I am concerned about planning for our community. I lived in California for 10 years. Anyone who is running for office ought to travel the freeways and stop at all the 'bedroom' communities to see what lack of planning produces. Our children's children must live with 'our' decisions. It is extremely important.

Other: Let's expose the philosophy and the actions of each candidate. If we are getting hot air, let's know about it. I am not speaking about gossip, hearsay, personality tripe. I am saying a person who does not recycle or has been outspoken about growth, is not believable when it comes to preserving open space. That is one example. Today, with all the media attention and preposterous looking good where is the substance of the candidate?

1. Home visits and literature were welcome and very informative and useful.
2. Nothing specific.
3. The candidates seemed to be very personally involved, which was good. It made me feel that they had a vested interest in what is happening.

I found both your literature and the Meet the Candidates Forums very helpful. I think the thing that influenced me most negatively was the letter sent out by the Republican candidates to Republicans. When the only reason you can give to vote for you is that you are a Republican is really poor.

1. What I found most helpful in deciding my vote were (a) the materials distributed by the WTRA profiling each of candidates; (b) candidates visiting the homes and telling us about their past activities and future plans (for example, Mr. Weiss visited our home and told us about his role in drafting a tree protection/replacement ordinance, a simple yet elegant and sensible idea); and (c) profiles about the candidates in the local papers.
2. Not really. Generally I think this was a clean, well-run campaign about the issues. All of the candidates are to be commended for this, in my opinion. What was also especially welcome was an absence of partisan appeals, and a focus on the issues. Again, all candidates should be commended for this.

3. One of the things that swayed my vote was the fact that one slate of candidates consisted of people who were heavily involved in the WTRA, and to me that's a good thing. While Whitemarsh Township is obviously still a great place to live and work, in the past 10 to 20 years there have been a number of projects done in the township that I suspect had the WTRA been involved in, these projects would have either never happened or would have happened in a radically different form. I am just guessing this really, as my wife and I only moved to Whitemarsh 4 years ago, but I am basing this judgment on recent history. One other thing swayed my vote, and this was I think more peculiar to this election. Nicole Fumo's father is Vincent Fumo, part of Philadelphia's Democratic machine. I am a Republican, but I doubted her Republican credentials given this pedigree, and suspected opportunism more than sincere beliefs in her deciding to run. Unlike all the other Republican and Democratic candidates, all of whom were very well qualified, Ms. Fumo also had a severe experience deficit. There's nothing wrong with being a Republican or Democrat, but the choice should be based on political views, not which party has an open seat. It would be like Chelsea Clinton running as a Republican. How would that be possible given her upbringing? It's just not plausible.

Other: The WTRA is doing a great job making sure Whitemarsh stays a great place to live and work. Just the number of projects in the last few years that the WTRA has either helped defeat or change is a terrific accomplishment for the residents. Thank you very much.

1. The WTRA brochure on the candidates was most helpful and put a lot of information in one place easy to reference.
 2. I don't see anything that I would change re the campaign
 3. In my case I have first hand knowledge of three of the candidates through working with them at WTRA. That was the positive thing that affected my vote.
-

1. We relied on Candidates' literature and the Voters Guide, and were impressed by a couple of candidates who stopped by the house. Sorry we missed the Forums. We'll try to attend next time. I'm certain they are a great source of information.
 2. Campaign literature was somewhat excessive.
 3. Not really. We vote across party lines for those we feel have the best qualifications.
-

Commenting only on the Whitemarsh Supervisor campaign:

1. WTRA Candidates Forums
 2. Not really
 3. Responses in the Forums were helpful.
-

1. Candidates' literature sent by WTRA. All the rest was unnecessary. Didn't need to get 3 pieces of mail in one day from the same party that I'm not even interested in because they were running a negative campaign.
2. Too much literature sent with way too many negative comments about the opposition. If they believe they are the best ones for us to vote for, they should rely on their records without innuendos about the opposition.
3. The more negative the information sent to my home, the more I resented and felt they were only interested in the politics of winning and not helping the Whitemarsh community. Someone living here for only 4 years does not have my best interests at heart, just their own agenda.

Where were all these do-gooders to stop The Hill and save the farmland before a retirement community was planned? Now that the entrance will be better on Thomas Road, these people are coming out to complain that their children could get hurt from more traffic even though they are not on Thomas Road, but it's all right to put the entrance in someone else's backyard where it will be more intrusive than on Thomas Road. One part of our Lafayette Hill community is being pitted against another, and the only winners are the people building the development.

1. WTRA Meet the Candidates Brochure, WTRA forums (unable to attend this year, but received detailed input from several attendees that changed my perspective on candidates), discussions with candidates.
2. Negative campaigning...it's a shame to see this so pervasive even at the local level.
3. Again, WTRA forums

Other: Just thankful for the work the WTRA has done. It has really raised the bar in terms of forcing candidates to do their homework and understand local issues.

1. We liked the home visits and the Candidates Forum.
 2. I think there ought to be more of the forums with all candidates and more audience participation.
 3. We found that the Republican Party used very negative and negative personal attacks on their opposition in their use of mailers. If candidates are going to use negative campaigning it ought to be where it can be answered by the people they are attacking in a public forum, not the last two days before an election. This tells me they did not even consider that they may lose until it was too late. (We are registered Dems but vote as Independent; we have traditionally voted for Republicans until this year.) I also really find it tacky to be approached at the polling place by the incumbent party and being told (forcefully) that I have to vote for their party (actually held my arm to stop me in order to talk to me). No political party should be allowed to camp out at the polling site because it can intimidate voters. (We vote at the elementary school on Joshua Rd. I was at the polls around 5:30PM.)
-

1. WTRA Meet the Candidates Brochure

2. Go non-partisan, but not sure if that is possible
 3. Was going to split my vote between the parties, but negative campaigning and finger pointing at the end swayed me to vote entirely for the winning slate
-

I am critical of what I believe are last minute shenanigans on the part of the incumbent School Board. Two elections ago they sent out last minute political letters in official School Board envelopes (?illegal), which they later made weak excuses for (they said they were unaware that such envelopes were being used).

I can't recall the specifics, but I believe the incumbent members of the School Board resorted to similarly unethical last minute tactics prior to the following election, and I wonder if they stayed true to form in the recent election. If so, I recommend that the WTRA keep the School Board reigned in tightly next time around.

I thought the WTRA Meet the Candidates Brochure and the WTRA Candidates Forum were very helpful.

1. The WTRA Forum and Brochure for BOS were both helpful. Some of the mailings were helpful, although there were too many and appeared, on both sides, to be repetitive. In the future, WTRA may want to rate candidates based on a set of objective criteria that deals with a broad range of issues.
 2. A discussion on a broader range of issues. The BOS race appeared to become a contest of "who could out open space the other" or "who could be more anti-development than the other" without any plan set forth as to how to "pay" for the proposals and ideas. (This applied to both sides.) There appeared to be little discussion on fiscal management or a broader range of township services.
 3. The candidates that presented themselves as independent leaders. This was the most important issue.
-

Home visits and flyers influenced me most. I really liked meeting the candidates personally in my neighborhood. I'm glad you had the Meet the Candidates nights, though unfortunately I had conflicts and couldn't attend either session. I found Jim McCann's letter confusing and perhaps inappropriate and was glad to get a reply from the candidates. I do not appreciate receiving such unsolicited letters and wish only to hear directly from the candidates.

1. Personal visits and WTRA Candidates forums
2. I think the process worked as it should have. The candidates who worked the hardest to get their message out ultimately won the contest. The ones who assumed incumbency and a poor voter turnout would help them gain office lost out (dirty tricks aside). It was a true "Cinderella" story, and an excellent civics lesson.

3. Positive: The earnestness, honesty, decency and intellect of the challengers shined brightly. They burned a lot of shoe leather and shook a lot of hands to win, and it worked. The WTRA Meet the Candidates forums were excellent.

Negative: The misinformation disseminated by the losing parties.

1. Most helpful was the Meet the Candidates brochure.
2. Can't think of any specific changes to be made to the campaign.
3. Most influential was the candidates' views on open space in the township.

Thanks for all of your hard work.

1. Candidate's literature was especially good this year. It did a good job of informing us how and when to register and vote as well as getting information across about the candidates. I wasn't able to go, but the WTRA Candidates Forum was a great idea and I would attend in the future.

The literature that I got bombarded with in the mail that pretty much just listed the candidates' names and party was useless and annoying. I read the brochures that detailed their background and views but threw out the others.

1. Home visits by the candidates (Dems).
 2. No "negative campaigning." I was very disturbed at the level of integrity (read "lack of") of the Republicans. I gave my feedback to the Repubs. at St Thomas church on voting day. I know this is how politics operate all around the country lately, but that is no excuse to sink to such a level. I feel there should be some accountability for literature distributed by all politicians. There should be some neutral commission or other group in place to screen what a candidate can say, and repercussions for false statements. If the facts don't back the claims, there should be no distribution of this material. In my opinion, the materials were libelous. The Dems consistently took the high road and I commend them for it. I told the Repub. reps that if the Dem. candidates practiced politics that way, they would lose my vote, even though I support them on the issues. I found this behavior completely offensive and, as I said, it should somehow be outlawed.
 3. Their position on the issues, experience and demeanor of the Dems won my vote.
-

1. I enjoyed the forum far more than expected and found it very helpful.
2. Perhaps we should have clarified the accuracy of some of the candidates statements. Sounded like certain candidates came up with the open space issues and the Erdenheim farm concepts on their own with no prodding by the citizens and the WTRA.