



# The Whitemarsh Vista

The Whitemarsh Township Residents Association Newsletter

Special Post-election Issue

Keeping our promise to keep you informed

## The Survey 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?

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

November 2003

Dear Friends of Whitemarsh,

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 political campaigns for Board of Supervisors and School Board. The results, as you will see, 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.

In the interest of space, we have excerpted what we think are the most useful comments from those that were sent to us. All of the comments, in their unexpurgated form, may be found on the WTRA web site ([www.WTRA.org](http://www.WTRA.org)). We welcome your responses to these survey results (send them to [info@wtra.org](mailto:info@wtra.org)) and will post these as well on our web site.

We want to thank everyone who took the time to complete our 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 in this newsletter are those of individual residents and do not necessarily reflect those of the WTRA.



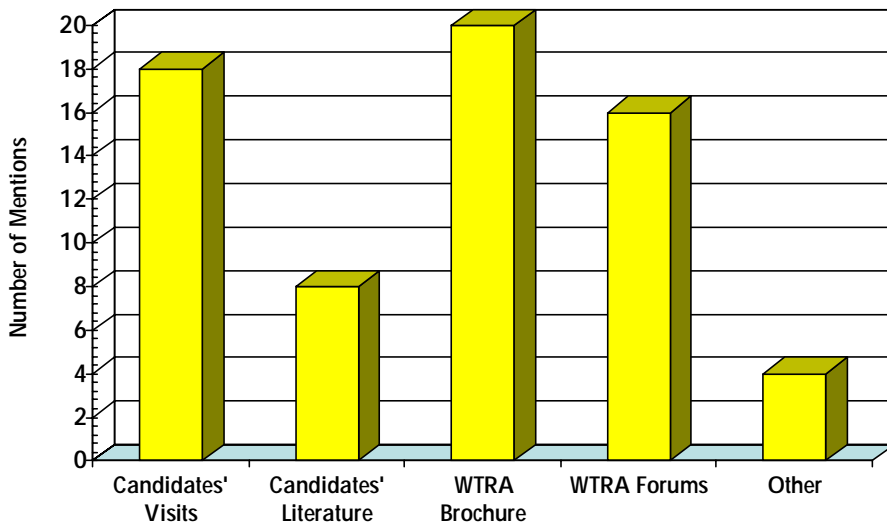
Board of Supervisors Candidates with moderator Nadya K. Shmavonian and WTRA President Kim Sheppard at the first Meet the Candidates Forum.

### Question 1:

## What materials or information did you find most helpful in deciding your vote?

**Respondents consistently mentioned personal visits by the candidates, and the WTRA Meet the Candidates brochure and Forums as being the most helpful. Many people commented on the volume of candidates' literature and were disturbed by its negative tone in the final days of the campaign. Other information sources mentioned were newspaper Voter Guides, web sites and signage. The following graph shows the number of times each category was mentioned.**

Most Helpful Information in Deciding Vote



### Voters' Comments

"Home visits and literature were welcome and very informative and useful."

"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 [sic] 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."

"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; and (c) profiles about the candidates in the local papers."

"I felt the candidates' literature was very biased and not always true and the WTRA literature didn't help me distinguish the positions enough."

"I didn't vote for school board candidates because I didn't have enough information on their individual positions to make educated decisions."

"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."

"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."

"I was fortunate to meet one of the Supervisor candidates the week before the election. It was the first time I had an opportunity to speak with him or any of the candidates directly...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."

"We made our decisions concerning the supervisors based on the forums and visits by the candidates."

"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; propaganda doesn't promote sincerity."

"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."

"I found the website very informative. Literature is all biased, can't be used to make a real judgment."

"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."

"I believe that in a township of our size...meeting as many citizens, families and voters as possible is the key to an informed voter and success for that candidate."

"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."



## Question 2

**W**ere there any aspects of the campaign you would like to see changed in the future? If so, what?

**Respondents seemed particularly turned off by the negative campaigning and the excessive amount of campaign literature and yard signs. They repeatedly expressed a desire for more substantive debate on the issues rather than the "canned" responses given at the Forums and the predictable rhetoric in the political literature. They also called for more accountability for statements made in campaign literature.**

## Voters' Comments

"In the future, WTRA may want to rate candidates based on a set of objective criteria that deals with a broad range of issues."

"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."

"Negative campaigning...it's a shame to see this so pervasive even at the local level."

[Forums] "There needed to be more time for residents' questions - 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."

"There was some real nastiness towards the end of the race which is new to our township. I hope that doesn't happen again."

"I think there ought to be more of the Forums with all candidates and more audience participation."

"No 'negative campaigning.' I was very disturbed at the level of integrity (read "lack of") of the Republicans...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 the 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 most issues. I found this behavior completely offensive and, as I said, it should be outlawed."

"Campaign literature was somewhat excessive."

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"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."

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"Too much literature sent with way too much 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."

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"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."

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"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."

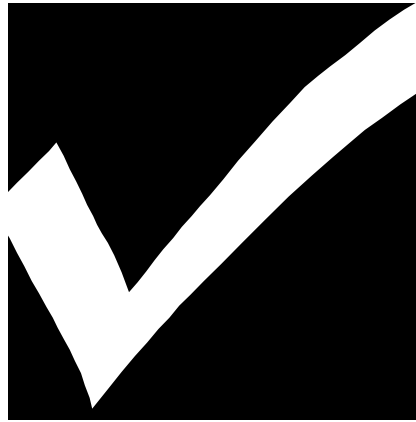
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"Generally I think this was a clean, well run campaign about the issues. All of the candidates are to be commended for this, in my opinion. What was also especially welcome was an absence of partisan appeals, and a focus on the issues."

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"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)."

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"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."

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"Negative campaigning...it's a shame to see this so pervasive even at the local level."

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"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 4 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."

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"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."

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"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."

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"Negative Campaigning is something I have very little tolerance for."

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"Less signs - they tend to make the area less appealing. Also the number of mailings indicate far too much money was spent."

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"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."

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"I would like to see candidates put the names of their parties on their signs again. The signs are not helpful without their affiliations."

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"No, I thought it was run in a fair and just manner... unlike Philadelphia!"

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"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."

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"Moritorium on signage. Additional forums where real issues can be discussed."

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"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."

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"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....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. Tax payers 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."

"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."

"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 Whitmarsh. It is a shame that the WTRA can't endorse."

"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."



### Question 3:

Was there anything, positive or negative, that swayed your vote? If so, what were these?

**Respondents seemed to be swayed by the candidates who they perceived as more thoughtful, experienced, knowledgeable and genuine. Several residents said they switched their vote in protest against the negative campaigning.**

### Voters' Comments

"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."

"We found that the Republican party used very negative personal attacks on their opposition in their use of mailers...in the last two days before [the] 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 Reps. until this year)

"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."

"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."

"There was a lot of negative mailers sent by the Republicans which actually discouraged us from voting for them."

"I was very upset to learn of the misleading information put out by the Cocoran [sic] team, and it cost them my vote."

"The candidates who worked the hardest to get their message out ultimately won the contest. The ones who assumed incumbency and a poor voter turn-out would help them gain office lost out (dirty tricks aside)."

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

"I 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."

"The candidates that presented themselves as independent leaders. This was the most important issue."

"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."

"It appeared from the 2nd [Forum] 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 was swayed by the Democrats' positive ideas and the Republicans' negative sentiments."

"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."

"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."

"The overall Republican County negative election campaign encouraged this independent voter to vote the Democratic slate without splitting the vote."

"Tired of "old regime" Want fresh ideas and approaches to our issues."

"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."

"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."

"Not really. We vote across party lines for those we feel have the best qualifications."

"Lack of good candidates by the Republicans and their failure to offer any new views."

#### Question 4:

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

### Voters' Comments

"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."

"Seemed pretty ugly."

"I'm glad it's over!"



### Whitemarsh Township Residents Association

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