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An ad hoc committee proposing changes to Lake Forest Caucus bylaws



Lake Forest Caucus general members overwhelmingly approved the Lake Forest Caucus Committee proposed slate in an Oct. 30 vote. Lake Forest Caucus officials recently received a series of recommendations an ad hoc committee to amend its bylaws. (Daniel I. Dorfman/ For the Pioneer Press)

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Lake Forest Caucus officials have received a series of recommendations to amend its bylaws, but whether the Caucus leadership will enact the suggestions remains unclear.

In a Feb. 11 email, Caucus President Joe Oriti informed its membership that an ad hoc committee formed to review the organization's bylaws has delivered its findings to the Caucus leadership. The seven-member committee, with former

City Manager Bob Kiely serving as its facilitator, proposed several changes following a tumultuous period for the organization, which has vetted and recommended candidates for various elective offices and city boards and commissions.

The Caucus has been part of Lake Forest's tapestry since 1935. In most election cycles, the candidate for any of the elected office initially seeks the support of the Caucus Committee, composed of representatives from all four of the city's wards. The person receiving that endorsement goes before the general Caucus membership in what normally is a "pro forma" vote, often leading to an uncontested race in the municipal election.

That did not occur in 2022 when the Caucus Committee endorsed Stanford "Randy" Tack in the mayoral election. However, the general membership did not support Tack's endorsement and the organization's bylaws were not clear on how to proceed.

The following year the Caucus leadership suffered another setback after it supported the "Caucus Preservation Act" which would have taken the general membership vote out of the process, but members said no to that idea.

The Caucus leadership suffered another blow last year when members initially voted down the proposed officer slate for the 2024-25 year with Oriti as president.

The Caucus Committee then held a second vote where the slate was easily approved. Oriti stated a review of the bylaws would be coming.

In their report, the ad hoc committee offers many suggestions: if a proposed candidate fails to receive a majority of votes cast at the annual meeting, the Caucus Committee should hold another vote by the Caucus membership for that position.

The second vote would have at least two candidates for each applicable position and could include candidates initially proposed at the Caucus's annual meeting traditionally held in the fall.

"The Caucus bylaws are currently silent on the matter which is what led to the upheaval back in 2022/2023," Kiely wrote in an e-mail.

However, Oriti was concerned about the proposal, citing recent changes to the overall election calendar dictated by the Illinois State Board of Elections regarding nominating petition deadlines.

He fears the ad hoc committee recommendations could reduce the vetting process as a second vote could come as many as 30 days after the initial vote. Plus, there could be corresponding internal timing problems tied to the election of Caucus Committee candidates and Executive Committee officers.

“By having the potential of a second vote and without shifting our calendar, we would only have two to three months for vetting where the current system allows four to six months. That might impact the quality of the candidates the Caucus Committee presents to the public for a vote,” Oriti said.

The ad hoc committee is also recommending the proposed slate for elected offices should be announced to the public at least 14 days before the annual meeting. Kiely said such a requirement does not exist in the bylaws and that has been a problem in previous years.

Any of the recommendations would require a 2/3 approval vote from the general Caucus membership, which Oriti does not think would happen at this point.

“I think it needs to be worked out,” he said.

Oriti added in his letter that an amendment to the Caucus membership for voting would also necessitate a review by attorneys that could cost as much as \$20,000. He said a fundraising campaign is ongoing to raise the money to pay for the legal review.

Going forward, Oriti said the Caucus Committee would review the recommendations at their March 11 meeting, anticipating that would be the start of a lengthy review of the recommendations.

Kiely said the suggestions were based in part on researching other communities and the establishment of a focus group. He was prepared the Caucus membership may not enact the suggestions.

“The ad hoc committee understood from the outset that our recommendations could be accepted, rejected or modified,” Kiely wrote in an e-mail. “We also understood that a super-majority of the membership needed to ratify any

changes, so finding common ground was going to be a challenge. There is no perfect solution, and some people will not agree with the recommendations. We can only hope that our work will be seen as an effort to aid the Caucus in strengthening its mission and regaining the trust of the community.”

Separately, Oriti originally thought the amendments would be up for a vote at the March 18 spring meeting, but that will not occur now.

John Trkla, the president of Lake Forest For Transparency, which describes itself as an “educational advocacy group” expressed frustration over the delay.

“Every time the subject of our vote comes up, there is another excuse to not do the right thing,” he said.

Oriti believed the diligence required to examine the recommendations warranted the extra time.

“I’m disappointed as well but the recommendations have a significant impact on the operations that it requires a thorough process and the importance is not to get it done fast, but to get it done right,” he countered. “I am pleased with the progress of the ad hoc committee and the focus group in providing the recommendations.”

Oriti added his overriding concern is whether the recommendations will help with recruitment of candidates for both the elected office and the Caucus.

“That is what modernization of the bylaws really do,” he said. “It should make it easier to recruit volunteers into the Caucus system.”

Daniel I. Dorfman is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.

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