

**Greenburgh Citizens' Advisory Commission Report On
Town Scholarships
March 20, 2012**

At the Town's Supervisors request, the Recreational & Community Services Subcommittee has reviewed the Scholarship procedures. It is our recommendation that Scholarship awards should be granted in accordance with procedures that ensure fair and equitable distribution to all residents of Greenburgh, and be based on income guidelines set by the Town. The current procedures are in accordance with established HUD standards

However, the aggregate of such Scholarships should be specifically budgeted as a separate line item. To the extent the Scholarship Awards determined in accordance with the procedures defined herein exceed the Scholarship Budget, the applicable agency heads must seek the approval of the Board to provide Scholarships in excess of the budget.

Background:

Historically the Town of Greenburgh's policy has been that no individual shall be denied participation in a Parks or Community Center program because of an inability to make full payment. All residents, including those who are economically challenged, were encouraged to take full advantage of the benefits of the Theodore D. Young Community Center, and/or the Greenburgh Park and Recreation departments. However, as far as we know, there is no Town law codifying this policy.

General Recommendations:

Confidential scholarship applications are to be made directly to the Commissioner of the program. If it is determined that a hardship exists, according to the guidelines officially approved by the Town, the applicant may be granted a reduction in the program fee. This will be in the form of a Scholarship, at the discretion of the Commissioner.

All applicants applying for a Scholarship must conform to official Standards set by the Town. Deviation from the present HUD standard will be documented and maintained for examination by a designee chosen by the Town i.e. the Town Comptroller, Town Supervisor, or Town Board.

In the event that the application is denied or an applicant disputes the amount of the award, the applicant can request an appeal of the Commissioner's decision. A designee chosen by the town i.e. the Town Comptroller and/or Town Supervisor and/or Town Board will examine the scholarship request. Whether the appeal is sustained or denied, a report of that decision should be provided to the applicant in writing and maintained by the department of origin

Scholarships process and procedures:

- *Applicant must be a resident of the unincorporated Town of Greenburgh*
- The Commission believes that a strong sense of ownership and pride is developed when the scholarship recipient contributes to the cost of his/her involvement. Therefore, applicants will be required to obtain a unicond for participation in a program.
- Applicant must obtain an application form from the desired department and program
 - Form and procedures to be made available online
- Application must be completely filled out and submitted to the Commissioner's office for review
 - Commissioner may have a designee review for completeness and appropriateness of applications
- Applicants will then meet with the Commissioner for review of documentation.
- Applicants will also be responsible for all applicable late fees. Late fees may NOT be deducted from the awarded scholarship amount.
- Once the scholarship is awarded, participants who choose not to participate in the program will NOT be given credit toward another program.
- Registration for a program will be accepted only after an application has been processed and approved.
- Financial aid benefits will be attached to each person in the household. All members of a family will receive the same percentage discount for activities and memberships.
- Applications need to be filed only once per year and need to be re-filed annually.
- Need for financial assistance is assessed on an annual basis.

Documentation to accompany application for review as applicable:

1. Income Related

- a. Salary or Wages in the form of a tax return
- b. Two (2) most recent pay stubs or SSI monthly statement

- c. Child Support
- d. Alimony
- e. Government Assistance (SSI, Disability, Unemployment Checks, etc.)
- f. Food Stamps
- g. Free or reduced lunch letter
- h. Internal Revenue Service documents
- i. Other income

2. Proof of residency for **ALL** adults in the household

- a. Government issued ID (i.e.: driver's license, military ID)
- b. Current utility bill
- c. Lease
- d. Notarized Letter from Landlord
- e. Other

3. Proof of guardianship, birth certificate or school record for **ALL** children in the household.

Internal controls:

- 1. Creation and use of a standardized form for all departments that offer a Scholarship. Language added to the form to encourage truthfulness when filing the application.
- 2. Incorporating the use of federal tax form 4506-T to support submitted tax documents.
- 3. When applicable a notarized statement of hardship should accompany the application.
- 4. The sliding scale that has been adopted should be standardized in its presentation
- 5. The Town Supervisor and Town Board will be responsible for providing direct supervision of Commissioners. The duly elected officials are responsible for ensuring the adherence to policy.
 - a. The Commissioners should not unnecessarily be micro managed, however, they should be held accountable to established standards and guidelines coupled to maintenance of supporting documentation available for review by a designee of the Town Board.
- 6. A database of awarded Scholarships should be developed for the purposes of accountability and transparency of all applications being made to both departments.

7. Although the Open Records Law may apply to all public documents, the individual departments will do everything, within the limitations of the law, to keep applications and supporting documentation strictly confidential. The only people that will have direct access to the completed “Application for Financial Assistance” forms, or any supporting documentation, will be designated staff or duly elected officials.
8. Any reports on the Scholarship Program will be used for analysis and will not include individual names of applicants.
7. If there are any exceptions to the guidelines that are used by the agencies to determine eligibility then a full explanation by the Commissioner should be made and that application should be *red flagged* for review by a designee of the Town Board.
8. An annual audit, of equal and randomly selected scholarships from all agencies, should be performed by the comptroller, or designee of the comptroller. If a scholarship is found to be approved outside of the guidelines set forth by the Town the agency Commissioner will be held accountable by the Town Board, and or Town Supervisor.
9. The Town Board, should formalize any recommendations of the GCAC, through resolution, that they choose to adopt or amend.

Conclusion:

Many thoughts and ideas that have been presented in this report are already being performed by both agencies. However, the major difference here is that we are asking the Town to pass a resolution, which will have the affect of legalizing the process. We have tried to create transparency and accountability so that no resident of Greenburgh will feel that they have either been denied a Scholarship or that a Scholarship has been wrongfully disbursed and that guidelines were not followed. These suggestions also provide oversight by a designee of the Town, which is critical for an appeals process as well as to examine any justification for not following the guidelines. The basic purpose is to ensure fairness to all citizens of the Town in applying for and receiving scholarships.