The campaign is thrilled to read the culmination of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Living Wage’s hard work and careful research. This proposal is groundbreaking in that it recognizes that with the current wage structure, low wage employees are not paid enough to meet their basic needs. In their report, the committee presents a set of recommendations designed to rectify these grave problems. Now it’s the community’s job to familiarize itself with the proposal, to make an informed response, and to support the principle of a living wage. Below you will find the SLWDC’s positions on the committee’s major recommendations – the original report is in standard font, and the campaign’s commentary is in italics. With an informed, united, and vocal community, we can see this process through and win a living wage!

“1. The Swarthmore minimum wage should be $10.72/hour.
Minority Recommendation: the Swarthmore minimum wage should be $13.89/hour.”

Since the SLWDC continues to be committed to improvements in compensation at the College, we will applaud any increase in wage levels for Swarthmore’s lowest-paid staff. At the same time, the Campaign has always advocated for a living wage – a compensation plan that allows one to support oneself and one’s family, while making choices about savings, education and family situation. Because it more closely embodies the spirit of a living wage, the Campaign supports, and will continue to agitate for, the minority recommendation of $13.89/hour.

“2. Swarthmore should introduce a new childcare subsidy benefit of up to $550/month for preschool-age children and $325/month for elementary school age children. The College would pay the actual costs of childcare, up to these maxima.
Minority Recommendation: childcare subsidy should be capped at $5,000 per employee.”

The SLWDC supports the majority recommendation.

“3. Swarthmore should modify its current health insurance benefits such that the lowest paid employees receive full HMO coverage for their families at no cost to them.”

The SLWDC supports the full HMO health coverage for lowest-paid staff and their families.
“4. Both the childcare benefit and the health insurance supplement should also be provided to employees whose wages are above the minimum, in amounts determined by a sliding scale that provides full benefit for people earning the College minimum, no benefit for employees earning $8/hour above the College minimum, and linearly decreasing benefit for employees in between.”

The SLWDC supports this proposal and applauds the committee’s desire to address compression in terms of both wages and benefits.

“5. Both the childcare benefit and the health insurance supplement should be means-tested. The means testing should be done in as simple and transparent a way as possible. The Committee recommends that employees who desire these new benefits submit a copy of their federal tax return each year, and that be used to determine whether employees are eligible, and where on the sliding scale they fit.”

The SLWDC cannot take a position regarding means-testing for benefits until we have a better idea of what such testing would entail, and how the process would be “simple and transparent.”

“6. The problem of “wage compression” should be addressed by providing wage increases for employees earning more than the College minimum according to a scale detailed in the report.”

The SLWDC supports this recommendation for addressing wage compression, and also supports the recommendation expressed elsewhere in this report that no employee should take a net cut in compensation, including in any subsequent reassessment of the benefit structure.

“7. The College minimum wage and the childcare benefit should be adjusted annually for inflation, so that they maintain their real value over time. The health insurance supplement should keep pace with annual increases in health insurance premiums to the College. In addition, the more complex calculations of the costs of meeting basic needs should be reviewed periodically, and the College minimum should be adjusted accordingly.”

The SLWDC applauds the Committee’s dedication to maintaining the value of the set wage over time through the creation of structures to periodically reevaluate the costs of living in the area. We would suggest a timeline of every two years.

“8. A multi-constituency Employment Practices Advisory Committee should be created to help monitor changes in the workforce in an effort to detect and correct potential unintended negative consequences of the change in the College’s compensation policy that are detailed in the report. The Committee’s primary concern would be to ensure that the College’s employment principles—as articulated in this report and elsewhere—remained central to its practice. The Committee should participate in the Board of Managers’ annual review of College employment practices with the Human Resources Department.”

The SLWDC believes that the creation of such a committee is absolutely essential. In order to be effective, this committee must have real power to make decisions and to implement necessary changes and controls, must keep minutes and present its findings to the overall community regularly, and must have significant representation of low-wage staff.