



FOREST HILL HOME OWNERS INC.

March 10, 2021

Virtual meeting

Attending: Gretchen Mettler, Bob Charlick, Ronald Ramsey, Jacqueline Kelly, Beryl Tishkoff, Tony Rupcic, Sam Kohn, Mark Madland, Tom Winston, Barbara Danforth, and Chris Hubbert.

Absent: Lee Barbee (excused), Ann Ghazy.

Gretchen called the meeting to order at 7:05.

The February minutes were approved as submitted.

Treasurers report

Tony prepared a forecast of the 2021 expenses and reviewed them with the Board. Tony expects \$11,710 total minimum expenses for the year. 16 total donations have been received by FHHO in 2021 so far. Tony expects a surplus this year which could be spent on needed maintenance of the Blue Cottage.

Gretchen and Ann volunteered to take over the landscaping of triangle and the Blue Cottage to help reduce landscaping costs. Two trustees have not yet contributed Chris and Mark.

Blue Cottage Discussion:

There were 2 items regarding the Blue Cottage that were discussed via email in the days preceding the March meeting. The first being a water problem, the second being an inquiry to purchase the property. Both were discussed during the following portion of the meeting.

Tony summarized the saga of the water problem at the Blue Cottage (the new water meter developed a massive leak). The leakage was successfully shut off by Mark in the cottage before the meter after a frustrating row with Cleveland Water. According to his recollection, the water meter leaked for 2 weeks but there was minimal damage overall because most of the water stayed on the cement floor of the utility room, where there is a drain. Tony was concerned about the bill.

Mark reported on the damage he saw at the Blue Cottage. He noted that all the radiator caps were off, the toilet valve open, and wondered aloud if they blew open. He continued by explaining that after the city fixes the water meter, a plumber will be hired to figure out how this issue happened, an insurance claim will likely be made, and that it will probably be an expensive repair that the utility should be responsible for. Chris agreed that if it was the water meter itself that resulted in damage to the property that shouldn't be FHHO's liability.

After some other hypotheses on the how the leakage started and what steps were taken to stop it the conversation shifted to the purchase inquiry.

The discussion started with Gretchen saying that she had met with someone who is interested in purchasing the Blue Cottage to convert it into a “tiny house”. She said that the trustees needed to decide if we wanted to sell the Blue Cottage at all before we discussed the potential for this particular buyer. Further, she reminded the trustees that even if we did decide to sell the cottage, the matter of selling it still needed to be ratified by the FHHO membership.

Barbara asking what the current uses of the Blue Cottage are. Chris and others explained the various committees, East Cleveland Parks Association, Forest Hill Historical Society, in addition to the FHHO who use the space. Chris recalled that the Blue Cottage used to have fixed office hours some time ago for the residents. He noted that events have been held there as well as community wide garage sales.

A number of background knowledge questions were asked by trustees. Trustees with knowledge of Blue Cottage helped establish some basic facts about the Blue Cottage: we own it outright, it is zoned as an office space currently, and inquirer wants to transform it to a residential building.

The following record summarizes a number of related and sometimes disparate comments about the proposal, the Blue Cottage, and its significance to Forest Hill:

Mark stated that the utility of Blue Cottage is limited simply because it is quite small and it is close to a church and community center with easily accessible space, he added that it is also a pain to maintain.

Tom sees the Blue Cottage as a resource dissemination center that has brand recognition which is an asset, but not much use as a meeting facility especially considering the amount of repairs needed.

Beryl explained that it would break her heart to sell it even though it requires a significant amount of work, she expressed that it felt ironic that FHHO cares deeply about home preservation but that there is general apathy about raising funds to preserve and maintain the Blue Cottage.

Bob cited the survey results which show that residents did not prioritize maintaining the Blue Cottage as the top priority FHHO should focus its energy. He finished by describing the \$75,000 estimate to restore the foundation of the Blue Cottage as really huge.

Chris views the Blue Cottage as having some value to the community as a symbol. The Blue Cottage provides continuity to the organization without could hurt FHHO. Considering the sale of the Blue Cottage, Chris explained how a conservation easement could be used to enforce the maintenance of exterior after it has been sold.

Gretchen noted that the buyer is attracted to its historic look and that is specifically why he is interested in the property. She added that if it were to be sold it must have the conservation easement because she would hate to see it lost.

Beryl wondered if the buyer actually has the means and capacity to successfully transform the Blue Cottage to a residential building.

Sam agreed with other trustees that the Blue Cottage has value as a symbol of the community, and that it can continue be a symbol of FHHO as a well-maintained private residence.

Mark thought in the case of selling the property for residential remodeling, that it may be wise to reduce the price to make sure buyer can spend the significant money needed to renovate it and make it attractive.

Barbara noted that rallying around preservation of the Blue Cottage could be an opportunity could accomplish multiple goals for FHHO: preserving the Blue Cottage, engaging residents who are out of touch with FHHO, and getting more residents committed to preservation. She concluded by saying there may be more love for the Blue Cottage than we realize.

Sam explained that the opportunity cost of spending time and energy on a Blue Cottage preservation campaign compared to other initiatives that help the community should be considered as well.

Beryl recalled Tess's idea to use the Blue Cottage as a community resource and event space. It could host bridal showers, birthdays, or other similar events. She agreed with Barbara that it could help rally the community and turn it into something of real value.

Mark suggested if there is a funding drive, that we not overlook Go Fund Me.

Ron asked how urgent the buyer is, perhaps FHHO could try to raise money first and take a year to test the water.

Tom added that the inquirer should be asked for an offer to see if it aligns with what we might be willing to sell the property for.

Gretchen responded by saying this is exactly what he is waiting to hear back from FHHO, are we open to hearing offers for the property?

Finally, Barbara moved that we do not sell the cottage. Seconded by Chris. Beryl wanted to amend the motion to say we do not sell the cottage at this time before we explore opportunities to raise funds and assess community support. Mark suggested adding a time feature. Seconded by Tony.

There was some discussion about the language of both motions. A great deal of the conversation regarded the finality of the motion. Trustees understood that the original language of the motion would not restrict FHHO's options in the future.

Barbara's original motion was put a vote. With 7 yes's and 3 no's, the motion passed.

Following the outcome of the vote, Gretchen urged the Trustees to start thinking about forming a campaign committee to raise funds for the preservation of the Blue Cottage. Gretchen, Barbara, and Beryl volunteered to work on forming this committee.

Preservation Committee

Tom wanted to know what the board believes is the premise of the maintaining the standards of FH homes. He explained that he has experienced pushback from trustees and residents regarding his efforts to notify homeowners whose property is in disrepair or to encourage them to make investments in their homes to an acceptable standard.

Tom continued by discussing the conditions of homes on Lee Blvd. They are prominent properties with junk, lawn furniture, cars parked on lawns and so forth in plain sight. He discussed a homeowner on Henley who wanted to expand his driveway. Tom was challenged by this homeowner and others regarding the legal authority of the FHHO to enforce deed restrictions of Forest Hill properties. Significantly, investors who are currently working on a number of homes in the neighborhood, consistently challenge Tom's authority to inspect or even comment on the property.

Tom expressed that his fears that the challenges to FHHO authority to enforce the preservation standards undermine the overall ability of the committee and FHHO. Chris responded by recalling the times FHHO did take homeowners to court with mixed results; some cases were won, others were withdrawn. Chris proposed that major issues should be transferred from the preservation committee to the whole Board for action.

Barbara suggested the committee set specific steps of escalation when they review properties. She noted specific parameters for carrot and stick incentives for amiably working with homeowners.

Tom diagnosed that number of less than friendly interactions are rooted homeowners' ignorance of the deed restrictions.

Ron stated the most important aspect is that prospective buyers need to be aware of what the expectations are for home preservation.

Gretchen suggested when we see a home for sale, we call that realtor and make sure they communicate the deed restrictions to prospective buyers.

Announcements

Mark is working on organizing a litter pick-up for April 17th.

The next meeting will be the 2nd Wednesday of April, the 14th.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:01

Sam Kohn, Secretary