

Forest Hill Home Owners, Inc.
Biannual Trustees' Meeting
March 13, 2012

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM by President Christopher Hubbert.

Minutes of the previous Trustees' Meeting (October 11, 2011) were provided by Secretary Joyce Rothenberger. (Copies available at the Blue Cottage.) Chris asked for approval of minutes, seconded by Ron DeVito, accepted unanimously. Trustees were asked to send any corrections noticed later to Joyce. Trustee Chair Hester Lewellen was asked to take minutes for this meeting in Joyce's absence.

Tony Rupcic presented the financial statements. (Copies available at the Blue Cottage.) Income for 2011 shows a net loss of \$1670.59. Although contributions are up slightly, expenses are also up (if the purchase of a new boiler last year is considered an anomaly) and interest rates on our investments are near zero. Tax assessment was based on total frontage, not valuation of property. The only way to increase income is to increase the total contributions. The question of raising dues was deferred till later in the meeting. Nate Wright made a motion to approve the financial statements, Lillian Houser seconded, accepted unanimously.

VP for Standards Jeff King was present to answer questions. It was acknowledged that not much happens with Standards during the winter, but that the coming of spring will mean an increase in complaints that will need to be acted on decisively. Trustees raised some specific questions about vinyl siding, choosing house paint colors, problems with landlords and renters, abandoned cars left in driveways, etc.

There is always a question of how aggressive FHHO can and should be in upholding the deed restrictions. Some residents have been told by realtors that they can ignore FHHO, some people withhold donations because FHHO is not aggressive enough. The association has basically taken the position that egregious problems will be dealt with swiftly (e.g., the pool in the front yard), other problems can be handled with letters, phone calls and visits from the Standards Committee. We don't want to go to court and lose a case, nor can we afford to pay a lot for legal fees. Enforcing housing standards is our core function, but we have to realize that people don't like being told what to do with their houses. Window requests, siding requests, gutter replacement requests will be coming in, and they need to be addressed in a reasonable way. We try to work from an architectural approach. Chris said Trustees should let us know when things are not right. We will cite the homeowner, contact the city. Our main concern is maintenance.

Chris does not believe the deed restrictions address the house color issue. The city (CH) used to attempt to enforce against garish colors, but now anything goes. The next Newsletter can suggest a free consultation with the Restoration Society for colors that are architecturally appropriate.

Mike mentioned the issue of the increased number of renters and our inability to get action from absentee landlords; he felt we could use our organization to lobby the city to act. Can we have Housing Court come in to talk to the Trustees. What is their interpretation of the tenant/landlord laws?

Cynthia Hunt suggested that the packet for new home owners contain suggestions about how to correctly rent out your home, how to evict renters. Gloria Strong suggested we give out a suggested lease agreement. You want the renter to be in trouble, not the landlord. Ron DeVito thought we could use the issue of “nuisance” for neighbors as a legal wedge. Nate Wright said it’s all about education — educating landlords, educating tenants. Lillian Houser said realtors are telling clients that there is a Forest Hill Home Owners organization but that the homeowner doesn’t have to pay attention to it. Chris: Gated community members also don’t think they have to pay attention. But we can reach out to realtors again. Gloria said we could pass out information to realtors, have an open house for them. Chris said we are a bizarre hybrid, we are a decades old homeowners organization. We have none of the tools of a modern homeowners association. But we cannot be a 501C3, so no tax advantage. Prior to 1950 FHHO had no standards. The Standards that were written then were based on the idea of statutory obligation to prevent nuisance issues. More recently FHHO has adopted a set of fines for residents. A reasonable set of fines should be enforceable. Sometimes the homeowner just doesn’t respond. We have sued and been successful, but we don’t want to tackle a case and lose; we want to limit ourselves to what would be a slam-dunk case, so it needs to be an egregious situation, not just a question of personal taste. Mike: We need to publicize the wins. So people know the successes. Reward homeowners who do a good job of keeping up their property by mentioning them in the Newsletter, giving them a sign for their front lawn, as a way to increase contributions. As to abandoned cars, Chris said call the city. If a car cannot be driven the city will have it towed and charge the owner. Jeff King will contact Forest Hill Pool about keeping up their property, will pursue the Hereford property with incorrectly attached stone facade.

President Chris Hubbert gave the Annual Report. (Copies available at the Blue Cottage.) He was pleased to report that the total amount of contributions was up slightly in 2011 as well as the number of contributors. Nevertheless, it remains a commitment of the Executive Board to try to increase both.

VP for Membership Sally Miller asked for volunteers to help with light housekeeping in the Cottage and light gardening outside the Cottage. Later in the spring we will ask for help with the triangle planting and clearing debris from the Burlington lot. We would like help in identifying who is dumping leaves on the Northvale triangle. Perhaps flyers could be distributed to nearby homes.

The new home owners’ packets are being distributed by Sally, Nate Wright, and relevant Trustees. Sally and Hester are opening the Blue Cottage on the first Saturday of each month from 9 to 12 for Trustees and other residents to pick up materials and ask questions.

Trustee Chair Hester Lewellen gave a report and checklist for Trustees based on the idea of a community of caring. (Copies available at the Blue Cottage.) Some of the suggestions for Trustees is to make a list of resident phone numbers to be shared just within the block, collect emails for quick communication, have a block party in the summer, have a wine and cheese in the winter, etc., things to bring neighbors together in a friendly way, maybe focused on a particular issue like crime prevention or street paving.

Other business:

Mike Reilly has suggested that FHHO offer a discount program to encourage residents to contribute to the organization. However, the details are still not completely worked out. For example, which merchants or businesses are offering discounts? What is the discount specifically? How will businesses know which home owners qualify for the discount by having donated at the higher level? What identification is the home owner to present to get the discount? How can the business limit the discount to one time per year? Will the discount card or letter have an expiration date — such as December 31, 2012? How will home owners know what the discounts are — listed on the web site? Not having the answers to these questions has held up the sending of the dues letter which usually goes out early in the year, since no amounts had been decided on. This means no money is coming in.

Discussion ensued as to what would be appropriate levels of contribution and what would be the best way to increase the overall totals. The suggested base line contribution is \$1 per week (\$52 per year), but conversation continued about what level to use for eligibility for discounts. Currently only 22.7% of homeowners are contributing; having two levels will make it easier for us to track whether or not this program is effective for increasing the number of contributors and the amount of contribution. Finally Chris Hubbert suggested \$52 as the base line and \$104 (\$2 per week) as the minimum level for the discount package. Fiona Reilly seconded. Passed unanimously.

A committee was formed with Jeff Dross as Chair to get specific recommendations and clarifications and definitive discount offers to go up on the web site. Trustees volunteering to serve on the committee were: Mike Reilly, Fiona Reilly, Ron DeVito, Gloria Strong, David Richardson, and Andrea Cameron.

Nate Wright gave a report on behalf of Trustee Adele DiMarco Kious about the availability of block grants. Information available through Neighborhood Connections, The Cleveland Foundation, 1422 Euclid, Suite 1300, Cleveland 44115
Program manager phone: 216-861-3810
Web sites: neighborhoodconnections@clevefdn.org or www.neighborhoodgrants.org

Light refreshments (fruit juice and cookies) were provided by Hester Lewellen.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 PM.