

Walnut Hill Quarterly

April 2008

Produced by the Walnut Hill Homeowners Association



Spring Edition

Annual Homeowners Meeting – George Mason Regional Library
Monday, April 14th at 7:00 pm

From the President

Dear Fellow Walnut Hill Neighbors:

Happy Spring! I hope that each of you appreciated our mild winter and is looking forward to the arrival of spring and its promise of renewed life.

Please plan to attend the annual Homeowners meeting at the George Mason Regional Library on Monday, April 14th at 7:00 p.m. This meeting serves as a great forum for the Board and the rest of your neighbors to hear your joys and concerns about our community and your ideas as to how the Board can better serve the residents of Walnut Hill. Several items of interest to everyone are on the agenda, including planned maintenance, upkeep and beautification activities for the remainder of the year and the financial health of the Association. In addition, we will bid farewell to Valerie Mawdsley as Vice President/Secretary on the WHHOA Board. Charlie Errico and I are happy to serve another term, if elected, but the community will need to vote on a replacement for Valerie. We appreciate Valerie's two years of service on the Board!

With the arrival of Spring, I am sure that many of you will want to tackle a home improvement project or two. As a reminder, the Covenants Committee should review and approve any project that substantially impacts your home's exterior or grounds. Karen Conroy, who serves as our representative from Capitol Property Management, will coordinate the Covenants

Committee's review and approval of your project and will help ensure that all projects are considered in a timely manner. Karen can be contacted at kconroy@capitolcorp.com or 703-707-6404.

We recently learned that the proposed Seville development, Sandals Estate Park, which was to be located on the Buddhist Temple site adjacent to our community, fell through. One of the potential sellers decided not to sell. The First Addition to State Hill, the nine Seville homes located to the north of our property, has been taken over by Sun Trust. Sun Trust has outsourced the completion of the project to an independent real estate service company. I spoke with the person in charge of the project and he assured me that our community's retention pond will be restored to its previous condition, including remediation of silt issues. Timing is uncertain, but I will continue to monitor the situation.

As we have previously communicated, our goals as your community Board are to be good stewards of our community's shared assets, to be responsive to your needs and desires, and to foster a warm, caring and welcoming neighborhood. We welcome your ideas and suggestions as to how we can improve and enhance our community. And, we welcome your help and involvement in making Walnut Hill a better place to live.

Yours in service,

Tracy Carney
carneys@cox.net

Property Management Contacts

Should you have any concerns regarding Walnut Hill, contact

Karen Conroy CMCA, AMS

Senior Community Association Manager

at Capitol Property Management:

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Chantilly, VA 20151

phone: (703) 707-6404; fax (703) 707-6401; email:

kconroy@capitolcorp.com

Our Community

WHHOA

Board of Directors

Tracy Carney, President
Valerie Mawdsley, Vice-President and Secretary
Charles Errico, Treasurer

Newsletter Crew

Valerie Mawdsley,
mawdsley1@cox.net
Lee Foreman,
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Dennis Williams,
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Denise Errico,
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The Capitol Management website includes a community web page at:
<http://www.capitolcorp.com/index.htm>.

WHHOA Newsletter Submissions

If you would like to submit something that is of general interest, please do so by email or by personal contact with one of the Newsletter staff. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit any submissions or not print a submission if it is not in the Community's best interests. Please, no anonymous submissions. Submissions for the July Newsletter should be sent by June 1.

Grounds Committee News

By Charlie Errico

The warmer weather means that the Grounds Committee has emerged from winter hibernation. We would like to organize a "spring cleaning" of the community on a weekend in the not too distant future. Neighbors would gather for a couple of hours to pick up debris from the streets, sidewalks, pond, and surrounding wooded area. With any luck, we will spot a fox or deer along the way. Such hard work deserves a reward and I would suggest that, following the clean up, we find a friendly deck or patio for soft drinks, beer, and wine. At our annual meeting on Monday, April 14, I will suggest some possible dates and we can work on the logistics.

Our tree service company AG&E will come out this spring to remove dead trees that did not survive the winter. Other trees from the common grounds need trimming and we have some limited funds for new plantings. If you have a tree on your property that needs trimming or removal, please let me know at the annual meeting. AG&E can do the work at a reduced price to you if they are already on our grounds performing a larger project.

Social Committee News

By Denise Errico

Plans are underway for a spring Progressive Dinner. At the April 14 homeowner's meeting, I will present two possible dates in June and then, after finding out which one works best for the community, will circulate a sign up sheet for those who wish to participate and to host. We are looking forward to another wonderful evening of fun and friendship in Walnut Hill!

The Social Committee would love to add YOUR news to our People in the News section. Please send information about graduations, weddings, school activities, anything you would like to share with our community to Denise Errico.

WALNUT HILL PEOPLE– Devin Mawdsley, student, College of William & Mary

Visual artist, influenced by artists ranging from Degas to D'Arista, he works in oil, pastel, watercolor, charcoal, pencil, pen and ink. Having taken commissions since before age 15, he is experienced and ready to work to your needs. For further information and price quotes, please contact Devin at dcmawd@gmail.com, or 703 973 2696. Thank you!



Police Patrol Priorities

by Gabe Goldberg

I participate in the police department's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), informal and interesting liaison between the community and police. At a recent CAC meeting, topics of police patrol were raised, specifically whether officers regularly patrol within developments.

Since I don't see patrol cars in Walnut Hill very often, I wondered whether such streets -- all dead ends and cul-de-sacs -- are patrolled, so I asked the supervisor for this patrol area.

My question: It's pretty quiet here but occasional drive throughs seem worthwhile, so officers know the development and what's normal in it.

The lieutenant's answer: Thank you for taking the time to write to me. I understand your concerns about not seeing patrol officers in your neighborhood and maybe I can shed some light on reasons you do not see them very often.

Officers that work during daylight hours, our day shift and evening shift, are usually very busy with taking reports and responding to calls for service. It is very difficult for them to actually get out into the neighborhoods on a routine basis and as you can imagine there are several hundred neighborhoods in the Mason district.

The midnight officers usually have some down time during the late night hours and a good portion of this time is spent checking businesses in the patrol officers' area. When they have the time they also try to pass through as many neighborhoods as possible. Due to the lateness of the hour, most citizens never see them during this time.

As issues and problems present themselves in the various neighborhoods, the officers divert their attention to those specific areas for extra patrol. With our minimum staffing level of 10 patrol officers on the midnight shift, there is only 1 police officer per patrol area at night. This makes it extremely difficult for officers to drive down neighborhood streets in their patrol area and also respond to calls for service, make arrests, write their reports, and check their businesses.

If there is a specific issue that arises in your neighborhood please let me know and we will attempt to address it for you. Officers will continue to drive through neighborhoods as they have time and hopefully you will have the opportunity to see them when they are out there.

Fairfax County to Recalculate Disputed 2008 Assessments

By Bill Turque, Washington Post Staff Writer

Fairfax County's chief tax official, under pressure from the Board of Supervisor and agitated homeowners, announced February 29 that his office would recalculate 2008 property assessments that show enormous increases in land values accompanied by deep cuts in the worth of homes.

Kevin Greenlief, director of the Fairfax Department of Tax Administration, has been adamant this week that the valuations mailed Monday were based on sound analysis of recent land sales.

But after an early evening meeting with County Executive Anthony H. Griffin and Board of Supervisors Chairman Gerald E. Connolly (D), Greenlief backed off and said the valuations would be redone. Of the 351,598 taxable parcels in the county, the value of 331,308 had changed. "From what the board has said and what the public has said, it warrants us taking a second look," Greenlief said. He said a property owner's overall assessment would not change. The county will adjust only the allocations of value between land and home.

It was a remarkably rapid admission of error by the county, which prizes its national reputation for steady, efficient management. Although Greenlief was appointed by Griffin, he and the board do not have the authority to force Greenlief to alter the valuations. Under state law, he is the equivalent of an independent, elected commissioner of revenue.

But Connolly and Griffin, who have been deluged with complaints from homeowners, made it clear to Greenlief yesterday that he had an emerging debacle on his hands.

"I don't think it passed the giggle test that a house in Fairfax County is worth \$63,000," Connolly said. "If that is true, we would be able to resolve our affordable housing crisis."

He was referring to a McLean home cited in a Washington Post article February 29. The overall assessment of the three-bedroom home declined slightly in the latest assessment. The value of the home dropped from \$266,590 last year to \$63,930, and the value of the land increased 66% to \$501,000.

Although the overall residential values in the county are down on average of 3 percent, tax officials said the elevated land assessments were based on studies of nearby vacant land. They said that because undeveloped land in the county is increasingly scarce, it took more than a year's worth of sales to evaluate the market. The result, Greenlief said, was a "pent-up correction."

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Community Recommendations

This is purely *caveat emptor* and members should make individual decisions.

The Severn Inn

A recommendation: The Severn Inn is located at 1993 Baltimore Annapolis Blvd, Annapolis, MD 21401, telephone 410.349.4000. It is located at water's edge on the north side of the Severn River, across from the Naval Academy on the other side of the River. With a beautiful view of the Severn, the Naval Academy and greater Annapolis, this is a wonderful setting for a Sunday brunch, whether it is for two or 10. Seating is both indoors and outdoors during the warmer months. The all-you-can-drink champagne, mimosas and bloody marys (with lots of horseradish) are included with the brunch. The brunch is about \$26 per person (excluding gratuities) and offers not only a magnificent view but excellent food and a great value. Their dinners are also excellent anytime. About an hour away from us, it is an easy drive around I-495 to Route 50 and then follow your Mapquest.com or RandMcNally.com directions. When you leave the Severn Inn, either follow your new .com directions, or go back across the Severn Bridge and follow the signs to Route 50. Make reservations, not so critical now, but will be as the temperature warms up, and it is almost impossible without reservations in the summer. This is worth the trip. And oh, those horseradish-laden bloody marys....

NEW GIANT

A new Giant Supermarket recently in Loehman's Plaza on Route 50 wide aisles, friendly staff, good selection, and (drum roll) apparently better computer/checkout equipment than the dreary/dumpy Giant in Annandale.

FAIRFAX COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT MASON DISTRICT STATION FREE!

HOME SECURITY SURVEY

Are you doing everything you can to secure your property and protect your family? You can have a Certified Crime Prevention Specialist assess your home's security and provide a written assessment.

The Mason District Station Crime Prevention Unit provides Home Security Surveys at no cost to residents. Learn how you can make your home less inviting for a would-be criminal.

For more information on this or any crime prevention matter, please call 703-256-8035.

Fairfax County Police Department

Mason District Station

Crime Prevention Unit

703-256-8035

Gabe Goldberg has had the survey done on two houses, first in The Pinecrest and recently here in Walnut Hill. The survey is VERY thorough, takes a couple hours, provides security enhancing suggestions, and is easy and inexpensive to implement.

(Even though we're in Providence District we're patrolled out of Mason Station. Don't ask.)

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Asked whether he understood Greenlief's explanation, Connolly said: "Understanding and accepting are two different things. Do I understand it? Yes. Do I accept the rationale? No, not really. I just think you should not be unduly burdening taxpayers in one year to make a correction that reflects several years. It's plain unfair to taxpayers."

In retrospect, Greenlief said, it might have been more prudent to phase in the increase in land values over several tax years.

"Hindsight is always 20-20," he said, "but it would have been a wise way to go about it."

Griffin said Greenlief's approach might have been technically proficient but was

"politically tone-deaf."

"We owe the board an explanation in some detail about what has transpired and why," Griffin said.

Supervisor Catherine M. Hudgins (D-Hunter Mill) said the land valuations threatened to undermine public confidence in the assessment process. That confidence, she said, begins with understanding the system. "Right now, I have a lot of constituents who don't understand."

Some Fairfax homeowners said this week that they suspected the county might have been using the spike in land values to retain revenue. The accusation was denied by tax officials, who said revenue is determined by applying the tax rate to overall assessments, which are down.

Some residents remained puzzled about anomalies in the assessments. Not everyone whose land value increased saw the total assessment decrease.

Connolly said he received the same surprise as thousands of other homeowners when he learned that the lot he owns adjacent to his Mantua home had appreciated 45 percent.

"I'm in there with everybody else," he said, adding that the first call he received about the problem was not from a concerned constituent but from his wife.

Footnote:

A concerned Walnut Hill Estates homeowner called the Administrative Appeals office listed on our Notice of Real Estate Assessment Change to question the increase in our land assessment. The response we received was that on the basis of the large number of appeals received from throughout Fairfax County the office is reassessing properties. In two to three weeks all homeowners in the neighborhood should receive a revised Notice of Assessment Change.