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Location

Severn Library 2624 Annapolis Rd, Severn, MD 21144 Meeting Room B and over Zoom.

Board of Directors present

- Tom Friedrich – President
- Mary Robinson – Vice President
- Kathie Cullins - Treasurer

Summary

- Meeting called to order at 2:05pm
- Utility Boxes & Sidewalks
- Social Media and Website improvements
- Outcome of November of 2023's mail-in voting.
- Website and Social media
- Metrics of Web and Facebook Presence
- Property Values
- Business Standing
- Financials
- Landscaping Costs/Area of Responsibility

- Insurance Coverage
- Fires/Crimes last 3 years
- Front Community Entrance Signs
- Mosquitos
- Propositions 1 - 12
- Parking and Streets
- Board requested to be up front with fine procedures/amounts
- Architectural Committee
- Tot Lot
- Gas lines
- Power provider selection PSA
- Volunteering
- Meeting adjourned at 4:11pm

In Depth

- Meeting called to order at 2:05pm
- Board noted that some PowerPoint slides that were being shared in person would not be available after publicly. These include things financial related and some metrics of our outreach.
- Board recapped a number of things in the last year:
 - Board reported 81 broken/dangerous utility boxes in the community to the county and they promptly notified all utility companies to fix 78 of those over 2 months. Work is completed now.
 - At the same time, the county also replaced all of the sidewalks that were hazardous in the community.
 - Talked about the website expansion. Supports HTTPS now so no more scary warnings, added a lot more informational resources so homeowners can go direct to the county for things, and other resources for new homeowners.
 - Talked about the successes of Mail-in Voting back in November.
 - Had voter turnout of 56 out of 115 homes, which excluding those not in good-standing (to mean not late more than 90 days in any kind of payments), was 54 out of 99 homes.
 - Only 1 of 12 propositions passed. The other 11 had 78-91% of the votes cast being in favor, but they failed to meet the secondary condition of the majority of ALL homeowners also being in favor.

Association Standing

Board shared where the community stands now for a few things:

- True property values in 2023 were up 10.4% from 2022.
 - 6 homes sold in 2022 in the 115-home community with an average final sale price of \$447,525.

- 4 homes sold in 2023 in the 115-home community (despite higher interest rates) for an average final sale price of \$494,070.
- Board will continue to track this.
- Business-wise the Association remains in good standing having filed taxes at county and federal level and having nothing legal pending against us. Board then showed a screenshot proving we're in good standing.
- Reviewed financials. Our expenses on paper seemed to have doubled between 2022 and 2023 but the Board believes this was due to a number of factors.
 - A payment for the landscaper from 2022 didn't get paid until 2023
 - Money was taken out of CDs that would have been earning interest in order to be able to apply for the grant (showing we had money we could put up to match what we were asking for)
 - There was some inflation in other things paid for like insurance and the landscaper
 - Lastly, the Board made a few long-term service or asset purchases like the mail-in voting box, 1 hour with a lawyer, some printouts of art we made, etc.
- Board assured everything is under control, including that funds will be placed back in a CD or jumbo money market to start earning high-interest yields after the fence is installed; bids will be solicited for landscaping services in the fall and an official contract will be entered into with the chosen landscaper; the Board will request the the county to do its share on its dime (mowing lawn area along Severn Tree Road); and the Board will seek to reduce other costs or otherwise earn more.
- Talked more about the state of landscaping and the 7 areas, at least according to the infographic made, the landscaper is mowing.
 - Homeowners raised the desire to make this publicly available as well as post the information needed, if possible, that would allow anyone to be able to contact the county to mow the land off the main street (*because it is a county responsibility*).
 - Board mentioned there is also a narrow 8th area at the further north of the community the Association owns but a Homeowner adjacent to it has been graciously mowing it and we thank them for helping to keep costs low.
 - Homeowners discussed the possibility of each homeowner volunteering one week a year to mow one of the Association areas they are near.
 - Group agreed it would be nice and would cut the Association's expenses considerably but may not be realistic given many people don't even have a lawn mower, they hire a company.

News

Board shared some news happening in the community:

- The grant from the casino to replace the front 1050 feet of fence running along Severn Road with a consistent white vinyl... was approved! We have to wait just to ensure their budget gets approved but if it is, we are good to begin.
 - Board will begin getting quotes again to replace the fence.

- Board to come up with a decision or come up with a plan on how to handle the ownership of said fence. On paper, the Association is the owner and is paying for the insurance of it but word of mouth years ago was that the fence was a one-time thing to make it what it is now and the Association holds no responsibility for it.
- After a rumor was raised that a Homeowner may want to paint their fence (unsure if vinyl) in their yard to black, the Board was urged to also consider putting in some rules for it, just in case, about how to maintain the fence and what can/can't be done with it for what is on Severn Rd. Board agreed.
- Group talked about insurance and what it covers.
 - Homeowner asked if they could see the 26-page insurance policy. Board said these documents, like all, are open to all Homeowners upon request.
 - Another homeowner raised that the Board may be under the county's umbrella policy and should do research into it.
 - Board was not aware nor heard of this county umbrella policy but agreed to look into it.
- Talked about police/crime as well as fires in the area.
 - There have been no fires and only minor police reports within the last 3 years anywhere within the last ~3 miles of us. Because the community is one-way-in one-way-out, many homes have a Ring camera it seems if not also a security system, and we are far from any high-density housing, we and surrounding neighborhoods have consistently kept out of it. This is also not expected to change but noting it anyway we have an easy way to start tracking it.
- Board shared an improvement with the signs at the front of the community. Did some trimming to avoid billing the landscaper where it didn't seem cost effective. In addition, the Board installed some cheap solar-paneled lights to illuminate the front-entrance signs at night.
 - To our knowledge, we're the only community we've found whose signs are illuminated at night and it has low enough lumens to not attract bugs or be an annoyance to the homes on the corners.
 - Consensus was felt by the homeowners that they thought it looked good.
 - Board mentioned they have plans to also maybe add new vegetation in the area but without access to water, need to do some research still for the hardiest native plants that still make people feel at home.

Old Business

- Talked about mosquitos, which is something that's been raised at least since the 2022 meeting.
 - Talked about what's been done in the past by the Board for it and some research into the problem the Board did in 2023.
 - Board in 2022 and early 2023 contacted the county to service the ponds, dam, and maybe even the larger streams.
 - Board in late 2023 identified a bit of trash in the Severn Woods part of the community that had been holding water. That has all been dumped over or removed. The bigger problem unfortunately is that the area in the Severn Woods is a 100-year floodplain and is

- essentially wetlands. The bigger streams can become stagnant, pool up, or break off into wetlands which the county can't put fish in or otherwise guarantee won't have mosquitos.
- Homeowners discussed the option to potentially put in bat boxes (bird houses for bats) in the back of the community to deal with the mosquitos coming from the loose pools of water.
 - General consensus was that because bats are the largest carrier of rabies and if they run out of room they may choose to look to live in our homes, we may not want to invite them into the neighborhood like this.
 - Homeowner brought up that maybe dragonflies would potentially work but conversation didn't go anywhere.
 - Board talked about the potential to set up little carbon dioxide traps we service around the perimeter of the forest just to see how that fairs but would need to do some research to see if it's even financially worth doing.
- Group had a discussion about Robert's Rules of Order and the value of it for our meetings. A homeowner stressed it was needed to protect the organization and homeowners in their decisions.
 - Board felt because quorum had not been reached for the meeting to make any kind of governing document change or other big change that no official votes could be taken. The Board said that despite that though, they felt that to ensure everyone's voice and times are respected, they still will reserve the right to fall back and require Robert's Rules if discourse became inefficient or uncivil. Board said it will follow up on whether following Robert's Rules of Order makes sense for our meetings and to understand its impact on motions and informal votes.
 - Group then began discussing the former 12 Propositions from last year.
 - Board proposed splitting up Proposition 1 on "Quorums" into two propositions:
 - Prop. 1a to no longer require a quorum to approve previous homeowner meeting minutes (if it even does now).
 - Prop. 1b to remove some language on the CC&Rs to make it consistent across the board that all updates to governing documents merely require majority consensus so long as the required quorum for the meeting or vote is reached.
 - Homeowners present felt in favor of Prop 1a but were confused by the original wording of Prop 1b. By the end of discussion the consensus was felt that the Board had finally figured out language that could be easily understood.
 - Board reminded Homeowners that Prop. 2 had passed allowing the number of Board member seats to fluctuate as needed between three (3) and nine (9). This has been updated on the website and submitted to the county.
 - Board proposed dropping Prop. 3 on allowing "Electronic Voting". Reasoning for this was that mail-in/drop-off voting worked so well, was pretty cheap to run, and some homeowners flagged they would not trust the results as much if it were electronic voting.
 - Homeowners present were in favor of dropping it. No objections noted.
 - Board proposed keeping Prop 4. on "Board Ethics" then opened it up for Homeowners present for any edits they think it would need before being presented to all Homeowners for a vote if they'd still want to see the Board go through with it.
 - Homeowner raised concern that Section 2 was too far reaching by saying any director found guilty in the court of public opinion for violating ethics that they, their kin, and

their current spouse would no longer be able to be a Board member in the community again. It should not include their kin because “we are not our parents”.

- Board and Homeowners present agreed to make the change.
- Another homeowner asked if we’d instead just want a period of 5-10 years or something where a person couldn’t be a Board member again if they were found to be guilty for not following one of the ethics defined in Section 1.
 - Consensus was not reached among homeowners for that.
- Homeowners present had no edits but requested the language be made available after the meeting to write in any suggestion that the Board might think prudent for future generations.
- Board proposed dropping Prop. 5 on “Election Procedures” as an official Proposition to instead just make it formally documented how the Board would carry them out. This would also give more flexibility to it throughout the years by not requiring the entire Homeowner consensus to change certain minor things about it.
 - Homeowner expressed concern that this might mean there are no election procedures currently in place. Board assured them there are minimum election procedure guidelines already as found in our Articles of Incorporation as well as the Maryland HOA Act, this would just be every other detail on how the Board would plan to carry them out each time.
- Board proposed changing Prop. 6 on “Ineligible voting” to add in the words “In good standing” and definition to mean not more than 90 days in arrears at the beginning of the CC&Rs in the definitions section. This is because Maryland has already ruled this is the way all voting for Homeowners associations should be done regardless of language they have in their documents and we have language that already supports it in the Articles of Incorporation, but just to avoid confusion, should be consistent everywhere by appending that language.
 - Homeowner expressed that we should explain what “not being current with payments”/”in arrears” means; is it just dues or also fines? Board agreed to add this.
 - No other Homeowner present had edits or indicated they were not in favor of putting this forward to the community.
- Board proposed dropping Prop. 7 on “Calls to Vote by Homeowners” to instead, like Prop 5., to just have it as a publicly available current procedure that would act as the Board guidelines. This can then be easily updated as time goes by so long as the minimum requirements in the Articles of Incorporation documents are still upheld.
 - No Homeowner present noted as being opposed.
- Board proposed dropping Prop 8. on “Mail-in Voting”. Board feels like it worked really well last time and might keep the same procedures, but just to allow it to be changed as time goes on or new Board members join or replace them currently, allow the flexibility for them.
 - No Homeowner present noted as being opposed.
- Board proposed changing Prop. 9 on “Board Permission to Maintain”. Despite getting 78%+ of the votes cast on the 2023 ballot in favor of it, some still felt it scary so proposing instead to just fix individual spelling errors noted to the present homeowners and will include it when taking it to the runoff meeting following with half the quorum.
 - Homeowners agreed with all spelling and grammatical changes noted... in fact they noted one other from the quotes provided that also needed fixing.

- Board proposed keeping Prop. 10 that would allow the Association to add attorney and processing fees to liens.
 - Board asked if Homeowners would feel more comfortable if it just allowed the Association to include processing/filing fees with the county but not attorney fees if going through them to do it or other legal actions.
 - Homeowner consensus was that the Proposition is fine as is.
- Board proposed keeping Prop. 11 on “Rule Update on Vehicles” but opened up like the other propositions for Homeowners present to discuss and push forward any updates.
 - Homeowners agreed it’s safer for children for RVs and trailers if they are in one’s driveway so long as it meets the conditions laid out in the Proposition, otherwise hidden or covered elsewhere on the property. Board felt consensus among Homeowners present was still very much in favor of this.
 - There was discussion about people parking in front of mailboxes and if there was anything that should be done with that. Fear from a Homeowner was that mail would not be delivered to their home if the post office could not easily see or get access to the mailbox.
 - Group consensus not sure if there is a legal precedent but should just try to talk to those parking the vehicle to see if they might offset it from their mailbox; they may just not be aware.
 - Discussion had about seeing if certain segments on one side of the street should be set with the county for no parking while at it to increase visibility and safety.
 - Other Homeowners stressed that would limit parking too much and make it untenable to ever have guests over.
 - One Homeowner said it might make people drive even faster if they felt they could.
 - Discussion had about potentially limiting said no parking to only certain hours of the day but the group was unsure what those hours would be.
 - The Board felt the consensus among Homeowners, given the argument against, was to not pursue any kind of limit to the parking within the community.
- Board proposed keeping Prop. 12 on “Rule Update on Fence” but opened it up for discussion among the Homeowners present.
 - Homeowner claimed this was already approved long ago and had been allowed by former architecture committees but there just is little to no documentation they know of to confirm.
 - Homeowner requested the addition to this Proposition that for all other things or differences related to Architectural committee matters that they can still be requested for consideration so it would be up to them to allow a fence, for example, coming from the front corners of the house not the middle.
 - Homeowners expressed no concern against the addition of that language and the pushing forward still with the proposition.
 - Board asked if homeowners would like a page on the website made for just these architectural things to mean our guidelines, what things do/don’t require submitting requests, how to submit a request, what things the county requires permits on for homeowner awareness, etc.

- Board felt consensus was very much in favor of that.
- Board raised this is also where we would approve last meeting's minutes but because quorum was unreachd for making changes to things, we are unsure if we can vote on approving those previous minutes. Just in case, the Board will include this vote in the upcoming Homeowner meeting which will only require half the original quorum.
 - Board showed the summary though of the last meeting minutes which was 5 pages long and provided the qr-code and link to it. Board noted all of the topics summarized in the last meeting were covered in previous sections of this meeting so far.
 - The Board felt the consensus among the Homeowners also hearing no objections that they did approve and it did properly encapsulate the last meeting but welcome re-reading in their own time when it is taken to a mail-in vote.

New Business

- Board shared their thinking for Proposition 13 which proposes for the Severn Road vinyl fence project to reimburse the two homeowners who already replaced their fences on their own dime in ~2022. The reimbursement would be based on the footage ratio of their fence (on Severn Road only) that is already vinyl and all based on the Board's quote not dollar-for-dollar for what the homeowners may have paid for it.
 - Board noted no objections or requests to edit it so the Board will proceed to include it in the next round of voting.
- Board let Homeowners know because they know how to and have all the documents to easily file grants and there are more out there, that they are hoping to roll out a referendum or survey by the end of year on what Homeowners feel is a priority for the tot lot should another grant be earned. At the very least this will just allow consensus from the rest of Owners what they'd even want to do with the open land, if anything.
 - Homeowner expressed concern that families from outside the community may start using it and also what would stop families or big parties from preventing the actual community members from using it.
 - Homeowner mentioned that children can and already play on the tot lot as is.
 - A couple homeowners disagreed saying they live next to it but probably have only ever seen kids play on it once or twice in a year.
 - A homeowner flagged that there are a considerable number of ant hills on the tot lot that make it unplayable for kids. The homeowner noted that they have ant hills on her property also that span from it.
 - Another Homeowner expressed concern it could increase insurance rates if a playground was for installed.
 - Board shared it would cut down on landscaping costs potentially though with the tot lot being the biggest area to mow. That being said, this would be on the referendum/survey of course; how much would homeowners be okay with raising dues if they got, for example, a playground, a partial concrete hard deck with a bench or two on it, a gazebo, etc. It is widely believed it will increase property values and bring about a quality of life improvement for young families so how much do homeowners feel it would be worth.

- Board opened up the floor for any new business and propositions by homeowners.
 - Homeowner raised the desire again for the Association to look into contacting BG&E or whoever again to see if we could get gas lines brought into the community.
 - For historical context, it was last raised in 2022's meeting where the community was offered it at the rate of \$5,000 per home, we believe, but the community at the time decided not to do it. However, because neighboring communities have it now and would only need to build on from their end, the cost would possibly not be as expensive to put in now.
 - Homeowner wanted to flag to everyone that if their energy bills are high, they are allowed to switch their carrier; BG&E is not the only option in town.
 - Board asked if those instructions on how to change one's energy provider would be of benefit if a page was created on the website for it. Homeowners agreed.
- Homeowner asked what the Board needs help with volunteer-wise. Board members honestly didn't expect the question so took a while to think and respond. Board would absolutely appreciate the help and will be better at asking for it.
 - Board will reach out via the Facebook page and email newsletters to ask for regular volunteers.

Meeting closed at 4:11pm.