Norton Hills Estates Recreation Association

September 2009 Newsletter

By Stan Miller – pres@nhera.org – 780-9219

Free Dinner and Drinks!

Please Come to the Annual Meeting Sept. 30

The 2009 annual meeting is set for Wednesday, Sept. 30, at House of Chan. Dinner and one drink is free to every resident in good standing, and a cash bar will be open for additional drinks for those not driving.

You must tell us you're coming by Sept. 23 so that we can provide an accurate count to the restaurant. Contact Secretary Jennifer Christman at 747-7222 or secy@nhera.org to RSVP.

The meeting room will open at 6:30 p.m. for socializing. Dinner will begin at 7 p.m., and the meeting will run from about 7:45-9 p.m. On the agenda:

- Setting dues for 2010.
- Exploring whether launching some committees would increase involvement in neighborhood affairs and provide more efficient governance.
- Election of officers.

The committees idea stems from two issues. First, we want to see whether more people would get more involved if they could make a smaller commitment than serving on the board entails. For instance, one reason we didn't have a block party this year is that no one on the board had time to organize one. I've heard from one resident who said she would've organized it had she known about the need, and we want to be sure people like her have a chance to get involved and make a difference in the neighborhood.

The second issue is that it's getting harder and harder to find meeting times convenient for all 14 current board members. Society was a bit different when the structure of the board was established in the late 1960s, and the neighborhood was quite a bit smaller. It's possible that four officers plus one board member for every block doesn't make sense anymore, and if the committee idea works out we may consider restructuring the board next year.

If you're interested in chairing or working on a committee, be sure to come to the annual meeting! We'll talk about the number and responsibilities of the committees at the meeting, so step up now and help define the committee you want to work on.

Legal Concerns Quash Idea of Association Expansion

Because of legal concerns, the Board of Directors has voted to stop exploring whether to expand the neighborhood association.

Neighbors from just outside the boundaries of Norton Hills Estates had asked to join the association, wanting legal access to the beach and to be part of neighborhood events and gatherings.

The Board was initially supportive, but consultations with Brad Fisher of Scholten Fant attorneys in Grand Haven revealed two main concerns that prompted the Board to table the idea.

The major concern was the lack of legal evidence entitling residents to use the driveway to get to our deck and beach stairs and the fact that we cannot unilaterally expand any easement that may exist on that driveway. Mr. Fisher said expansion of the association could spark challenges to our access rights that we might not be able to defend.

Mr. Fisher also told us that both the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws would require amendments to allow for expansion. Amending the Bylaws is relatively easy, but amending the articles is more difficult and would require additional legal work.

The Board voted to table expansion unless Ed and Nancy Spier, the neighbors who want to join us, agree to pay for the additional legal work. I've since spoken with Mr. Spier, and they do not want to incur that expense.

Correction: In the last newsletter, I wrote that the Board voted to spend up to $260 for legal work on this issue, an amount equal to the current $60 annual dues plus "a $200 entry fee – the same fee payable to the association upon the original sale of lots in the subdivision from the developer to the first homeowners." The Board indeed approved $260, but the amount was based on an error: The association actually was paid $250, not $200, for the original sale of each lot.

Need North Hilltop Block Chair

No one has come forward yet to serve as block chair for North Hilltop Drive. If you live on North Hilltop and are willing to serve as block chair, please contact a board member.

Duties of the job are simple: Block chairs represent the interests of their block at board and annual meetings; greet new residents of their block with a welcome packet provided by the board; and ensure that new residents' contact information is provided promptly to the secretary.

Brace for Delays: Dunes Parkway Repaving Starts Soon

Resurfacing of Dunes Parkway is likely to begin in mid- to late September, and delays getting in and out of the neighborhood are likely at times, city officials say.

"There may be some delays and such, but the road will be open, one lane at least, at all times," said Jerry Bartoszek, director of public works for the city. "We're not going to close anybody off completely."

Flaggers or temporary traffic lights at both ends of the work will control traffic while the roads are limited to one lane, Mr. Bartoszek said.

Dates for the work are not yet firm, but the same contractor will be working on Forest Park Road and Ritter Hills Drive as well, and the Ritter Hills work will be done first starting soon after Labor Day, said City Engineer Jim Murphy. All three projects should be completed by mid-October, he said.

Dunes and Forest Park are school bus routes. The city has kept the school district informed about the pending work, said Joe Paquin, director of operations for Mona Shores Schools.

"We will do our best to try and get (buses) through," Mr. Paquin said. "I do appreciate the city giving us information ahead of time, but I wish they would've done this stuff during the summer."

Both the school district and the city promise to keep residents informed. I'll send e-mail updates, too; if you want to receive those e-mails, please be sure your e-mail address is listed correctly in the neighborhood directory. If it's not, contact any board member.

Several sidewalk improvements will be made in conjunction with the repaving work; see the map at www.nhera.org/docs/DunesSidewalks.html for details.

Board Approves Bylaws Change to Shorten Dues Period

The Board of Directors voted unanimously to approve Treasurer Tom Sanocki's proposal to amend the bylaws to shorten the deadlines for paying annual dues and any special assessments.

Dues notices will be mailed by Jan. 31 as usual, and the due date remains March 1. But starting next year, a late fee equal to one-third of the dues will be assessed to all residents who have not paid by March 1. That's 60 days earlier than the first late fee has been assessed in the past. The late fee will increase to two-thirds of the dues for anyone who still hasn't paid by April 1, and to 100 percent of the dues by May 1. Any account still unpaid by June 1 would be declared delinquent, 30 days earlier than under the old bylaw.

Although every resident paid 2009's dues before late fees kicked in, Tom had to call and knock on doors in late April to collect from several homeowners. He believes the long deadline contributes to residents putting off or forgetting about the bill.

"My intention is not to collect more money for the association," Tom said. "It is to bring in the payments in a more timely fashion."

We will not reprint the bylaws in their entirety for this change, which alters Section 3.5. The change is shown on our Web site at www.nhera.org/docs/bylaws; the complete text of the bylaws at their last full printing in April 2004, and a list of all changes since then, can be downloaded from the site as well.

2008-09 Board of Directors

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Stan Miller – 780-9219, pres@nhera.org

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Jennifer Christman – 747-7222, secy@nhera.org

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Briefly

Tennis court. The city is no longer interested in running a sewer line through our park to replace the lift station on upper Norcrest Drive, which frees us up to repair or replace the tennis court on our own schedule. The Board will solicit recommendations and bids and consider this work in budgeting for 2010.

Park and path stairs. A contractor we asked to provide an estimate on power washing and sealing the stairs into our park and along the path recommended against doing the work. He judged the stairs structurally sound and said given the difficulty of getting equipment and water to the stairs, we'd be better off to save the money and replace the stairs as that becomes necessary. The Board accepted that recommendation; the $700 we budgeted for this work this year will remain in the checking account for future needs.

Pets. Please remember that city ordinances require dogs and cats to be fenced or leashed; it's neither legal nor safe to allow them to roam the neighborhood free.

New to the neighborhood? Contact the secretary or your block chair for a welcome packet.