

HICKORY FARMS COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

November 2021 Edition



HICKORYFARMS.ORG

P.O. BOX 2239, FAIRFAX VA 22031

HFCA BOARD & VOLUNTEERS

President: Sean Coleman (acting)
Vice President: Jim Bever
Secretary: Carlie Mensen
ACC: Pam Barrett
Treasurer: Ken Sorg
Assistant Treasurer: *Vacant*
Common Areas: Melissa Stark
Webmaster: Bryan Crabtree
Neighborhood Watch: *Vacant*
Newsletter Editor: Bill Berg
At Large: Telah Jackson, Kathie Schmidt
Social Committee: Meredith Perkins, Sarah Tropiano
Architectural Reviews: Pam Barrett, Keith Ferguson, Donna Garfield, Ed Kiechlin, Josef Gasimov
Newsletter Delivery: John Kitzmiller, Heather Webb, Dante Gilmer, Ed Kiechlin, Claire and Sean Coleman, Jennifer Maloney, *Vacant*

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By: Sean Coleman

Fall has certainly come to our corner of Fairfax. The temperatures have dropped, the trees are starting to show their color and another certain indicator was that Hickory Farms held its annual homeowners meeting last week--via video-conference for the first time ever! Thank you to the 25 households that showed up to the meeting and to the roughly 30 other households that submitted proxies--which together allowed us to have an official quorum for our meeting for the first time in a number of years!

We accomplished a lot in the two hours of the annual meeting. Most of the Board ran to serve another term and were re-elected unanimously to serve for 2022. The published Board-approved Budget for 2022 was affirmed almost unanimously, including the \$11 increase in Annual Assessment dues to \$261. (Note: The new budget takes effect on January 1, 2022.) We announced that the Board has also pushed back by one month the time when the dues are scheduled to be paid--to the month of January, with the new due date of January 31, 2022. The Board would certainly like to hear from those who attended the meeting how effective you thought the format was versus having it in person: please let me know and I will share with the Board.

Last month the Board voted to consider options during 2022 for upgrading the currently deteriorating section of the paved path near the eastern, bottom end of the lower commons area. After 12 years of use since its last repair at the same location, it is well worn and may soon be a safety hazard to both walkers and bikers due to the buckling and ruts that have developed over time. The Board is looking for volunteers to assist us in looking at options during the first few months of next year. If interested, please contact me.

As we all look to the New Year, I would like to emphasize the extremely valuable role of volunteers. Volunteering a couple of hours here or there is how Hickory Farms and other communities have thrived over the last half century. Serving on the Board or an ad hoc committee like the one for the Lower Common Area path or assisting with helping maintain the Common Areas of the neighborhood has always been how our neighborhood has thrived and how we've kept our homeowners' Annual Assessment dues low. However, as the number of people who have volunteered has dwindled in the last ten or so years, more of the effort has fallen on fewer and fewer of our neighbors as volunteers to handle the community's responsibilities. If this trend continues, then there is only one viable option to maintaining the value of our neighborhood and that is for us to pay to hire a professional management company to run many of our affairs and for us to pay to outsource more duties regarding the Common Areas to private companies – with the concomitant increase in Annual Assessment dues to two times or more than their current level. The Board has not yet explored a professional management company and more paid outsourcing of services, but if trends continue, then a future Board may have to do that.

The biggest need that the neighborhood has right now for volunteers is for the common areas committee to assist Melissa Stark with keeping our common areas attractive places for us to walk and play. The other largest needs are three more people for the Board: an Assistant Treasurer, someone to lead the Neighborhood Watch program, and another At-Large member. None of these positions take an average of more than one to two hours a week, if that. Please let me know of your interest.

Wishing all a safe and candied Halloween and a Thanksgiving filled with family and friends.

-Sean (president@hickoryfarms.org)

2021 ANNUAL MEETING TREASURER REPORT

By: Ken Sorg

At the recent annual meeting a summary review of the current budget year and expenses was provided along with a review of the 2022 budget. HF homeowners later affirmed the 2022 budget with a strong majority vote.

In an effort to improve fiscal deliberateness and transparency, several actions have been unanimously adopted by the board of directors. These include logic and methodology that will guide future budget actions for funding the capital reserve (funds for future repair/replacement/emergencies of Hickory Farms' assets) and setting annual assessments. These actions will enhance HFCA posture to make improvements, be more predictable and better protect homeowners from potential emergency assessments.

The 2022 annual assessment (\$261.00) due date has changed from 12/31/21 to 1/31/22. This date change will remain 1/31 in following years. This single act of changing the due date to 1/31 will reduce the accounting entries from one fiscal year to the next fiscal year, reduce confusion, and reduce the stress associated with many trips to the post office (HFCA PO Box) and making bank deposits during a busy holiday season.

Special thank you to all HFCA homeowners for continued on-time payments of annual assessments. Assessments are a direct investment in our community. All 198 homeowners have paid their annual assessments for three straight years... no missed payments!



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STUDENT YELLOW PAGES

If you offer services such as raking leaves, lawn mowing, babysitting, general home maintenance, dog walking, tutoring, etc., please email Bill at berg_bill@yahoo.com to be included.

Britney Mulliner (17)	571-474-7277	Babysitting and dog sitting
Cody Dempster (17)	703-776-0101	Yard work, snow shoveling, housework
Lauren Turner (17)	Angmtturn@hotmail.com	Pet Sitting
Shannon Turner (16)	Angmtturn@hotmail.com	Pet Sitting
Nathan Turner (11)	Angmtturn@hotmail.com	Dog walking, yard work and watering, leaf removal and snow shoveling
Kiera Stark (11)	commonareas@hickoryfarms.org	Pet sitting, plant/tree watering, weed picking and leaf raking
Kent Coddling (18)	703-317-7319	Shovel snow, yard work, leaf raking
Xavier Gilmer (15)	703-862-2192	Shovel snow; lawn mowing
George Coddling (14)	703-223-4101	Snow shovel, yard work, leaf raking



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2021 COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS – 82 TOTAL RESPONSES

By: Telah Jackson

Would you agree that maintaining an informative and up-to-date Hickory Farms website is important for communicating with homeowners, would be home buyers and prospective renters?

Yes - 91.5%

No - 8.5%

How often would you like to receive the newsletter?

Monthly -45.1%

Bi-Monthly (Every other month) 31.7%

Quarterly – 23.2%

Would you like to hear from realtors in the area about how Hickory Farms compares to other neighborhoods and their thoughts on how to keep us competitive from a resale price and other perspectives?

Yes – 63.4%

No – 36.6%

Would you support new community improvements if they resulted in an increase in yearly dues?

Yes – 52.4%

No – 47.6%

If you answered yes to supporting new community improvements, what would you support? 42 responses (Here are the top answers. The full list will be posted on the website)

Entrance Signs

Recreation in upper commons – playground, picnic tables, pavilion, more benches

Single trash and recycle provider

Signage

Safety-related

Depends on the improvements/projects

Are there areas, within our community, where you would like to see current funds directed?

Yes – 35.4%

No – 64.6%

If you answered yes to funds being directed to additional areas, where would you like to see them directed? 34 Responses (Here are the some of the answers. The full list will be posted on the website)

Depends on the project

ACC walk arounds done by a professional company

Common trash removal

Lower path needs repairing

Maintenance of common grounds in current state

Speed bumps

Entrance signs

Which of the following should the HOA continue to do to maintain the appearance and health of the common areas?

- A phased plan of future planting of native trees and wildflowers – 43.9%
- Elimination of invasive vegetation – 74.4%
- Selective Pruning – 57.3%
- Removal of diseased or damaged trees – 90.2%

How often do you use the common areas?

- Daily – 28%
- Weekly – 28%
- Monthly – 28%
- Never - 15.9%

Would you support having a professional company manage our property knowing this would mean an increase in annual dues?

- Yes – 34.1%
- No – 65.9%

Would you be interested in participating in the Neighborhood Watch program?

- Yes – 14.6%
- No – 63.4%
- Maybe – 22%

Are you interested in joining the board or a committee?

- Yes – 11%
- No – 69.5%
- Maybe 19.5%

WANT TO CONTACT THE BOARD?

Board of Directors: hfca@hickoryfarms.org
Architectural Control Committee: acc@hickoryfarms.org
President: president@hickoryfarms.org
Treasurer: treasurer@hickoryfarms.org
Common Areas: commonareas@hickoryfarms.org
Webmaster: webmaster@hickoryfarms.org
Social Committee: social@hickoryfarms.org
Secretary: secretary@hickoryfarms.org

2021 ANNUAL MEETING SECRETARY REPORT

By: Carlie Mensen

October is one of the busiest times of year for the HFCA secretary and this year was no different with our first virtual annual meeting. We had 25 homes in attendance and 32 proxies submitted in advance to help us reach a total of 57 homes represented for a quorum. Thank you to those who submitted a proxy in advance—it is instrumental in the board's planning process to ensure that we will have enough homes represented to complete any needed votes. More importantly it allows the board to connect with the community and ensure important information that affects your surrounding community, home values, neighbors, and common areas is shared.

JOIN OUR LISTSERV

There's no better way to stay in touch than through our Hickory Farms email listserv. Visit hickoryfarms.org, click "Email Listserv" in the "For Residents" menu and follow the instructions.



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BIRDS OF HICKORY FARMS

By: Bob Cosgriff

As you read this, trees have begun changing colors and some leaves may already have dropped. The days will be shorter as daylight savings time ends. The fall migration for song birds is over, although some raptors will continue to move south through November. Many birds that breed farther north actually overwinter here in Northern Virginia and surrounding areas, including the Chesapeake Bay. These include Bald Eagle, Canada Goose, Tundra Swan and many duck species, such as Ruddy Duck, Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, Wood Duck, and Redhead Duck. These can be seen offshore at the Occoquan Bay NWR in Woodbridge, among other places along the Potomac.

In Hickory Farms, we will see the return of White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco, birds that will remain with us all winter. Year-round residents like American Bluebird, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee, Blue Jay, and various woodpeckers (Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied) will brighten up our yards and common areas. These birds will come readily to backyard feeders. A variety of offerings, to include black oil sunflower seeds, nyjer (thistle), safflower, as well as suet will bring these and other birds to your yard. Be sure that your feeder poles have raccoon baffles on them and are located at least 10' away from anything that can serve as a launching pad for a squirrel.

Last year, various birds that breed in the boreal forests of Canada and the upper United States irrupted south to our area, including Pine Siskin, Purple Finch, White-winged Crossbill, Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. We did record Pine Siskin and Purple Finch in our yard, but did not see any of the others. The forecast for this winter is that the once-in-a-decade irruption of last year was just that, and most of these birds will stay well north of us since food sources will be sufficient for their needs over the winter.

Virginia now has an official Wildlife Viewing Plan, the first of its kind in the nation. Developed jointly by the Department of Wildlife Resources and Virginia Tech's Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation, the plan defines wildlife viewing as "intentionally observing, feeding [wild birds], photographing wildlife, or visiting or maintaining natural areas because of wildlife."

The plan will be used as a blueprint for developing facilities and programs to enhance the opportunity for all citizens to become involved in wildlife viewing, be it in a backyard or a state park or wildlife management area. Hickory Farms is certainly a place where wildlife viewing takes place, offering such features as our bluebird trail, natural wildflower meadows, native tree planting areas, and seasonal bird walks. The pandemic has shown that people appreciate spaces where they can get out of the house and enjoy nature. Federal, state and local parks experienced an upswing in use. Hopefully, this trend will continue into the future. As the definition indicates, individuals can be part of improving the natural environment in their own yards.

Speaking of bird walks, Hickory Farms can now boast six certified "Junior Birdwatchers" who took part in the fall migration bird walk on October 18th. The participants had to record birds on the basis of color, size, and activity. They got to look inside of some of our bird boxes to see empty bluebird and house wren nests. Everyone, adults included, had a good time. We will repeat our spring and fall bird walks in 2022, with separate sessions for adults and kids. Watch the website and neighborhood Listserve for more details next spring.

One of the rituals for this time of year is to clean out the bluebird boxes in preparation for the next breeding season. It is important to remove nesting material and fecal matter to prevent disease. Bluebirds and other species will use these boxes in cold weather for shelter, so we will have to do a bit of housecleaning around the end of February or early March next year. So until then, keep your eyes open, your feeders full, and enjoy the winter birds of Hickory Farms.

PLOGGING

By: Bob Cosgriff

Okay, you ask, what is plogging? I'm glad you asked. It is an activity that started in Sweden in 2016 and comes from two Swedish words meaning "pick up and run." From Sweden, it spread into the rest of Europe and to the United States and other countries around the world. In simplest terms, it is jogging and picking up litter. Of course, it can be modified to include walking and picking up litter. It combines the cardio benefits of running or walking with the benefits of bending and stretching. Moreover, it helps keep our streets more attractive by removing litter.

The best place to start plogging is right here in Hickory Farms. Litter happens. Why? People driving through the neighborhood might throw something out the window. Debris blows out of cars, pickups, and commercial garbage trucks. The wind might blow litter in from elsewhere. While you and I did not put the litter here, if we don't pick it up when we see it, then it is going to detract from the appearance of Hickory Farms. And the same goes for surrounding neighborhoods and parks where many of us enjoy walking or running.

Plogging requires only two things: a pair of gloves and a litterbag. Depending on where you are plogging, there might be trash receptacles available along your route to put your collected litter into as you go along. Otherwise, you can carry it with you in the litterbag and discard it in your own garbage can or recycling bin when you get back home. In either case, you will have added a little variety to your run or walk and you will have contributed to a cleaner, more attractive Fairfax. Consider becoming a plogging practitioner!

NOVEMBER HFCA BOARD MEETING

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hickory Farms Board Meetings are now conducted using the Zoom audio/video conference application. That means that every Hickory Farms Community Association member can observe their Board in action without leaving home! The next HFCA Board meeting will be held Tuesday, 09 November at 7pm. To join the meeting, contact any HFCA Board Member or send a request to join to hfca@hickoryfarms.org. You will also be provided with the Zoom meeting URL, meeting number and passcode.

Hickory Farms has a strong and consistent history of transparency regarding access by members to Board Meetings and the challenges facing our community. Please consider attending the Board Meeting so that you are fully informed with the issues facing our neighborhood!

RABBIT RUN RESTORATION

By: Bob Cosgriff

In 2019, the HFCA Board, concerned about severe erosion in our Rabbit Run Resource Protection Area, took several steps to investigate solutions, including consultations with representatives of the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, a professional engineer with expertise in stream erosion problems, and the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES). In December, 2019, Charles Smith, Branch Chief, Watersheds Projects in the Stormwater Planning Division met with board members and looked at our problem. This was followed in September, 2020, by an official assessment of Rabbit Run. The upshot of these steps is that Rabbit Run has been placed in the approved DPWES work plan for Fiscal Year 2024, meaning that design work can commence after 1 July, 2023. Other steps will include obtaining easements from affected property owners on Burke Station Road, and receiving all required County and Federal permits for the work. Once these are in place, the work will be advertised and a contract awarded. All this will take at least a year, so our best estimate is that work could potentially begin sometime in mid-calendar year 2024, depending on several factors, including other DPWES priorities, funding, and completion of all the steps mentioned above in a timely fashion. So, bottom line, the start of actual construction is still two to three years off.

The goal of the stream restoration is to restore the flood plain to as close to its natural (pre-Hickory Farms) state as possible. This, in turn, will provide for a natural water flow that will eliminate future flooding and erosion along the main stream and feeders coming in from Burke Station Road. There are various techniques that are used in such projects, depending on the specific conditions encountered. Mr. Smith indicated that at the 35% design review stage, he would brief HFCA on the draft plan (the “where” and “how”). At the 65% design stage, more specifics would be provided (e.g., grading plan, location of construction access and material storage areas, any necessary tree removal, and selected engineering solutions, etc.)

DPWES has already completed three similar projects in Rabbit Branch to our south. Our stream, Rabbit Run, is a tributary of Rabbit Branch, which picks up other tributaries before flowing into Royal Lake in the Kings Park West subdivision south of us. Restoration of our segment of this watershed is important since it is located very close to the source of the stream in Fairfax City just north of Hickory Farms, and remediation done here will reinforce work done downstream of us.

To summarize, the Rabbit Run restoration project is approved as part of the DPWES FY24 work plan, meaning design will start after 1 July, 2023. Design could take up to a year or more, which means we probably won't see any plans until sometime in 2024, if then. So we will need to be patient. The good news is that in a few years, our common area (including the trail) in Rabbit Run will be restored to a natural and safe condition of all of us to enjoy for many years to come.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTROL COMMITTEE (ACC)

By: Pam Barrett

Function & Responsibilities

The ACC goal is to enhance quality of life for Hickory Farms residents by maintaining the standards that create a level of neighborhood desirability resulting in high home values.

HFCA homeowners agreed to the following terms when we signed our purchase documents. *The Declaration directs us to form an ACC to monitor community standards that protect investment and home values per:*

1.4 Maintaining Lots, Yards, and Carports

[Declarations, Article VII, Restrictive Covenants, Section 4]:

- a) All lots and yards shall be maintained in a neat and attractive manner so as not to detract from the appearance of the Hickory Farms Community;*
- b) All dwellings shall be kept in good repair (e.g., shutters, trim, fences, siding, roof, etc.) and maintained in keeping with the standards of the neighborhood and development;*
- c) All curbs, driveways and sidewalks of lots shall be edged as needed to maintain a neat appearance and so that grass does not grow over curbs and sidewalks; and*
- d) Flower beds and landscaping shall be maintained in an attractive manner so as not to detract from the appearance of the neighborhood or encroach on public and common areas. Trees, shrubs, and bushes shall be trimmed on a regular basis.*

Make-up of ACC

- * Our Deed and Declarations state the ACC must have a minimum of four homeowners (Including the chairperson)
- * Currently there are 5 members
- * The president is the ex-officio member (To resolve deadlocks)

Responsibilities

- * Enforce the Declarations' Restrictive Covenants per HFCA By-Laws and Rules and Regulations
- * Evaluate proposed improvements
- * Evaluate property for violations prior to sale
- * Implement periodic property inspections

45 improvement applications submitted and reviewed

- * Generally, there was an eight day turnaround time after receipt of all requested documents
- * The longest turnaround time was about 28 days

10 property Owner Association inspections for property sale settlements

- * The shortest time on the market was 8 hours
- * The longest time on the market was 7 weeks
- * Two violations were corrected prior to sale.

Review of inspection process and data

- * Neighborhood-wide property inspection took place in June, July and August - 198 homes
- * This was 4th year since 2016 after a gap of several years.
- * Three ACC members and three volunteers from the community completed the inspections.

***ACC is currently seeking more help and a Co-Chair for 2022**

Generation and distribution of notices of violation

- * Letters are prepared and mailed by the ACC with email follow-up
- * 13 were sent to homes with extensive or severe violations
- * 7 sent to homes with minor to moderate violations
- * 8 in-person calls made for minor violations
- * 4 violation corrections made or currently in process

*If violations are not corrected, the ACC may take stronger enforcement action for continuing violations. HFCA due process allows for a hearing with an attorney present before the HFCA Board of Directors.

- * ACC is currently seeking more help and a Co-chair for 2022

Note regarding Annual Meeting Discussion on HFCA Rules-

Our By-laws and Rules and Regulations subjectively interpret our Restrictive Covenants. Other community associations incorporated at approximately the same time as HFCA have documents nearly identical to ours, but they may have very different -more often stricter -Rules relating to their Covenants, Sometimes this depends on the decision to be more restrictive or less restrictive culturally. Each neighborhood may take a different approach to deciding what is important i.e., the length of the grass, the style of the mail box, or the color of holiday lights. These differences are sometimes written broadly into By-laws, and then specified in Rules and Regulations, derived from and referring back to a section Restrictive Covenants The culture of Hickory Farms has always been to be less restrictive than other associations with nearly the same documents,