

MILL CREEK HOME



Newsletter of the Mill Creek Homeowners Association, Charlottesville, Virginia
also available online at <http://millcreekhomeowners.org>

Call for Nominations for Board of Directors

Elections to the HOA Board of Directors will be held at the Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 15. The Treasurer position remains vacant, the current President is not seeking re-election, and one of the members at large will leave the Board. Our bylaws require five Board members.

Please volunteer for HOA service. The Board has worked hard this year to make HOA service more fun and productive. Our meetings are short, and Board duties stimulate a real sense of being plugged-in and connected to the neighborhood. We even have a new slogan: "HOA Board membership—less time-consuming than church; more rewarding than the lottery."

Any Board member can give you more information about what is involved. Our community needs you.

Brian Lewis

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Annual Meeting moved to April

A recent bylaws revision moves the annual homeowners meeting from January to April, when better weather and more daylight will make it easier for homeowners to attend. This also gives the Elections Committee more time after the holidays to prepare for elections.

Mark your calendars: The 2015 meeting will be Wednesday, April 15, 7:00–9:00PM, at Monticello High School. See you there!

2015 Annual HOA Assessment

The annual assessment for 2015 is \$102.00, the same amount as for several years. The Board is pleased to be able to keep the assessment at this low level. Payment is due no later than January 31, 2015.

Please contact a Board member to make alternate payment arrangements if you cannot meet the payment by the due date.

Meet our new Office Manager: Carmen Trimble

In November, the Board created a position for a part-time office manager. This position is a win-win-win for Mill Creek. It is good news for opponents of third-party professional management, while at the same time providing more consistency in HOA operations. Future Board and committee volunteers will now have knowledgeable support and smoother transitions. We are fortunate that Carmen Trimble, who fulfills the same role for Mill Creek South, agreed to take the position.

Carmen grew up in Richmond, but always felt drawn to the mountains—she came to C'ville in 1983 to attend UVA (BA/MS) and never left. When she's not being trained by her black lab, Carmen enjoys spending time with her husband and children. The Trimbles like to RV, relax in Myrtle Beach, and enjoy classic muscle cars—they are restoring Carmen's dream truck, a 1949 Chevy pickup. You can say hello to Carmen at Office@MillCreekClassic.org.

Roaming Pets

Sometimes our indoor cats get outside by accident, and sometimes our dogs go on unintended walkabouts in the neighborhood. We don't plan it, but the truth is, it happens. Do yourself, your pet, and your neighbors a service and be sure that your pet always has current identification tags with your address and contact details. This will allow a concerned neighbor who comes upon your Fido or Fluffy to easily and quickly return them without causing you and your pet unnecessary stress. Otherwise, your pet may end up at the Charlottesville-Albemarle SPCA, which is the County pound/shelter.

New county leash law. Last year the County implemented leash laws. You can expect to receive a fine if your dog is off-leash outside of your property.

Opt-in for Snail Mail

Printed announcements and newsletters, like this one, are an expense we can mitigate with web-based services. Printing and mailing costs for a single newsletter can exceed \$200. **If you do not currently receive HOA email from our website, it is because we do not have your email address.** Please save yourself and your neighbors the extra cost of printed materials by giving your email address to the Board—you will receive current news and special announcements automatically, about 10 times a year.

If you do not have or use a computer, please tell us! We will make sure that you receive print materials. Simply tear off this page and mail it back to us at:

Mill Creek HOA
P.O. Box 1301
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Make sure your return address is legible.

Web-based Announcements versus Email list: What's the difference?

Official HOA news is sent from our website via email. In addition, homeowner Barbara Mann maintains a neighborhood email list and sends informal notices about a wide range of issues. Some email notices are about local issues such as County actions, while others are homeowners' requests for information about contractors and services, lost pets, and other concerns.

How to sign up?

For official notices, sign up on our website at <http://millcreekhomeowners.org>.

For the neighborhood list, sign up with Barb Mann at bjm2r@virginia.edu.

News from the Board

Resignation

Member-at-large Janet Eden resigned in August after five years on the Board. Her valuable contributions, especially as a certified arborist, were a service to us all.

Survey results & Town Hall Meeting

The Board hosted a Town Hall meeting for Mill Creek homeowners on October 14, and 25 people attended. The results from this summer's survey were enlightening and useful.

Feedback guides Board. Based on feedback from the survey, the Board's direction is pretty clear. Homeowners are not interested in a "management company" style of governance, where Board and committee members look for violations and proceed to fine owners. At the same time, most homeowners agree that covenants must be enforced on occasion. The Board will continue to respond to homeowner complaints that allege violations of our covenants, conditions, and restrictions.

Work with neighbors to resolve issues. Homeowners are strongly encouraged to communicate and work with their neighbors about covenant issues. Our HOA Board is neither trained nor legally empowered to mediate disputes between homeowners that do not arise from the covenants. Many non-covenant issues, such as pet-related issues, are addressed through county, state, or federal law.

Possible fines. On the rare occasion that written notice from the Board is not sufficient to resolve a covenant violation, ad hoc fines will be determined by vote at any scheduled or special meeting of the Board.

Minutes from the town hall meeting are posted on our website at <http://millcreekhomeowners.org>.

New processes: *Architectural Review Committee; complaints; contractor recommendations; elections*

The Board has developed several new processes to assist homeowners with requests or complaints to the HOA. Forms for these processes are on the homepage of our website.

- The Architectural Review Committee Proposal Request form, which is similar to the one used by Mill Creek South, allows the Board to collect required information and track requests involving any changes to structures or lots, including paint, trees, sheds, additions and/or anything defined by Article VII of the Mill Creek covenants.
- The complaint form follows a standardized complaint resolution process.

These forms **must** be used when making ARC requests or complaints to the HOA.

- The contractor recommendations page of our website, now updated and improved, lets homeowners recommend local services as well as assist others to find the help they need. Recommendations are verified, and only Mill Creek homeowners may make recommendations.
- Finally, the election process has been crafted to provide maximum inclusiveness and voting flexibility, and the 2014 elections demonstrated its effectiveness. A few improvements will be added for the 2015 elections.

Make a Difference: Come to Board Meetings

Discuss your ideas, ask questions, learn more about current issues.

Second Tuesdays at 7:00 pm, usually at Monticello High School in the library (see website for exceptions).

Parking, Emergency Services, and Snowstorms

On-street parking was never envisioned for Mill Creek: first, our streets were designed to narrow specifications and built without curbs; and second, our covenants were amended to require each homeowner to maintain "permanently, a minimum of two (2) off-street parking spaces."

Safety concern. Some homeowners have been parking street side for years or even decades. But we witnessed the downside of this practice in 2014. Several of our neighbors have needed County EMS services recently. EMS ambulances are, by policy, accompanied by large fire trucks. Watching those trucks trying to get in & out of our neighborhood has been a real learning experience. In fact, the Albemarle-County Fire Department has a PowerPoint presentation that shows how this situation is a major problem in constricted areas like Mill Creek. Cars parked on the roadside narrow the available roadway for emergency vehicles such as ambulances and fire trucks.

Our first responders—police and firefighters—would like us to stop parking on our roadsides unless absolutely necessary. (VDOT wants the same during snowstorms, but we'll come to that later.) Although there are many good reasons not to park on our roadsides, the most compelling reason is improved access for first responders, which is about safety. Here's a realistic example: If you have a vehicle parked across the street from another vehicle, measure the distance between your cars. A ladder truck or "tower" requires 24 feet of space once its stabilizing legs are extended. Some Mill Creek streets are barely 24 feet wide from edge to edge. Parking one car at the roadside narrows the available space for emergency vehicles—and having cars on both sides of the street leaves very little roadway. The bottom line: That's not enough room for your car and their fire truck. If the fire department has to "nudge" your vehicle out of the way in an emergency, the County will bill you for any damage to the fire truck, and you will also have to pay for any damage to your vehicle. Not all insurers will cover those claims.

The most important point, however, is that clogging our roads delays first responders. Homeowners should park at least two of their vehicles in their own driveways before parking on the street. And when it is necessary to park on the street, cars should not be parked directly across from another roadside vehicle.

Snow plowing; property values. Parking amid snow storms brings several issues: safety, plow access, mail delivery, and the inconvenience to homeowners when driveways are plowed in. Without a doubt, the consensus has been that we would rather deal with plowed-in driveways than unplowed streets—but plows cannot plow with cars parked on the street. And when vehicles remain parked in one spot, without moving, neighbors inevitably see a decrease in "curb appeal," a threat to property values.

Actions. Move vehicles off the streets when possible. However, they cannot be moved onto yards (except by formal waiver in unusual circumstances). This may be inconvenient for some, but is necessary for the welfare and safety of the whole community. The Board will ask Albemarle fire and police to attend our annual meeting in April to explain their requirements and answer any questions. Any of us may need a police officer, firefighter, or paramedic—and we need them to get to us safely.

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