

# ***The Woods Garden Club Annual Meeting***

## ***Meeting Minutes***

January 30, 2024—6:00 PM

***PLEASE NOTE THAT THESE MEETING MINUTES ARE MADE AVAILABLE HERE BUT HAVE NOT BEEN APPROVED. THESE MINUTES WILL NOT BE APPROVED UNTIL THE ANNUAL MEETING IN JANUARY OF 2025.***

### **I. Call to order**

President Donna Dozier called the Annual Meeting to order at 6:04 PM. The meeting was held at the meeting room for the Tyler Tabernacle, located at 3115 E 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Tyler.

### **II. Approval of Minutes**

After circulating copies of the minutes of the Annual Meeting from January 24, 2023, Donna asked if everyone had a chance to look them over for approval. A motion was made by Mr. Terry Doyle to accept the minutes. Mr. Charlie Colman seconded the motion to accept the minutes. The motion passed unanimously and the Meeting Minutes for 2023 were approved.

### **III. Introduction of 2023 Board Members**

Board members for 2023 were presented by Donna Dozier. Richard Patteson, Vice President; Chris Petty, Treasurer, and Secretary Ron Stutes were noted, as were the remaining board members, Troy Mills, Jon Stone and Ken Wheeler, Jr, our Developer's Representative.

#### **A. Support Staff**

The support staff was introduced, including Dawn Smith, who is our Certified Property Manager, with East Texas Community Management. Our webmaster is Steve Fitzgerald. Our insurance agent is Linda Rowe with State Farm. Doug Stapleton with Whitehouse Pools takes care of our pool, and Kenneth Edwards, owner of Edwards Lawn Care, is our landscaper.

## **B. Pool Committee**

The Pool Committee for 2023 was introduced. James Sheridan, Gordy Widman, Jennifer Murphy, Kaela Riley and Doug Stapleton did an outstanding job for us.

## **C. Architectural Control Committee**

Ken Wheeler, Jr. handles the Architectural Control Committee work, along with Troy Mills' help. Ken is also our liaison with our landscaper and with Tru Green.

## **IV. Financial Report**

Dawn Smith, our property manager with East Texas Community Management, presented our financial report for the year 2023. Dawn said our total expenses exceeded our budget this year. The expenses totaled \$170,861.78, but unfortunately, our budget was \$154,372.00. Dawn said we exceeded our budget this year because of a \$12,000 drainage repair bill that had to be made at the end of 2022/23. Besides that expense, our tree budget exceeded what we had projected by \$15,000. We had so many trees that had to be removed, particularly after the ice storm early in the year.

Dawn reports that our assets, at the end of the year, in our Operating, or checking account, were \$6,507.52. Our Savings held \$64,331.37, for a total at year's end of \$70,838.89.

Dawn explained, using two slides on the Power Point presentation, to detail why our costs exceeded our budget for 2023. She said more would be discussed later in the meeting about that.

## **V. 2023 Year in Review**

Donna said that it seemed as if every day, someone was telling us or reporting about tree damage. It started very early in the year, with the ice storm, and resulting problems from the damage the ice did to our trees and shrubs. Our greenbelts suffered and there was a lot of clean-up to pay for, that was well beyond the scope of our normal work.

Donna reported that in April, she invited Chapel Hill ISD's Superintendent, Mr. Lamond Dean, to come speak to our residents once again, to help them understand the particulars of the newest proposed bond issue. Since our HOA is in the Chapel Hill ISD and we pay taxes to them, it was important to understand the proposals. The bond issue passed in the May election.

Donna said that Vexus and Optimum are still doing tweaks to their new fiber optic lines, and that AT&T has told her they will also be coming through, but they have no timeline on their work yet. Donna said that if anyone has had damage caused by Vexus or Optimum, to please call Burren Reed with the City of Tyler, and she provided the phone number for him.

There was slide to show all the work the City began, in their overhauling of the sewer system in Tyler. Our area was one of the first parts of the city to get attention for the upgrade.

The pool opened right on schedule, on May 1<sup>st</sup>. We had new pool chairs and new rugs to start the season. Donna said that there was only one 24-hour period we had to close during the entire season.

Crutcher and Hartley sponsored the Splash Party with us once again and provided the giant water slide. Our HOA, along with East Texas Home and Pest Inspections provided pulled-pork sandwiches and Kona Ice was there as well.

Donna reported that the Toll 49 Project is officially listed as "on hold." The NET RMA ((North East Texas Regional Mobility Association) still has this as a plan for the future, but it is on hold.

The Shiloh Road Extension Project is another road project that will affect our neighborhood. Donna said she attended a meeting to see the very early plans offered by the engineering firm the City of Tyler hired. There are numerous stages this undertaking has to go through, and there are still many decisions to be made. This project is meant to extend Shiloh Road from State Highway 110 to Old Omen Road. Ground is not expected to be

broken until late 2024 or 2025. Given that Union Pacific Railroad is involved, it takes even more time to create an acceptable plan.

Continuing in a timeline format, Donna said that Crutcher and Hartley informed her that they would not be able to provide the Grinchmas display at the pool that they've been doing since Donna invited them to do it in the Covid year of 2020. They were simply overextended and couldn't do it this year. After this sad news was posted to our Facebook group page, one of our residents, the owner of Day One Insurance Group, stepped up and offered to provide "A Charlie Brown Christmas" theme for us.

The board accepted that offer, and we enjoyed the colorful display at our pool area. We had a neighborhood get-together on December 14<sup>th</sup>, and visited with our neighbors while enjoying drinks from Travelin' Tom's Coffee and Hot Chocolate truck.

Donna said that our December was also marked by having to file a police report, due to vandals taking our signs in the Ridge area. Also, the sign post at Cripple Creek and Lazy Creek was destroyed, then stolen completely. These signs were taken from Ridgebluff Circle, Lazy Creek, Big Oak, Westbluff and a few others. These signs must be special ordered, and are expensive to replace, but we will replace them as soon as possible.

Once again, we offered a \$50 gift card to any resident who wanted to enter our Holiday Lighting Contest. The winner of our 2023 contest was Mollie Lara, from our Stonebrook area.

Donna said that to cap off the summary of 2023, she liked to report what the most complained about item was for the year. The problem Donna got the most complaints about was continuously barking dogs and unleashed dogs. Closely behind this topic were complaints about tree limbs or trees down on the greenbelt areas.

And finally, Donna said there might be one more bit of information you would like, and that is that Lloyd Nichols is now our City Councilman and Donna provided his number.

## **VI. Candidate Introduction: Election of board members**

Donna reported that there were three open positions on the board, and that each of the three members holding those positions had agreed to run for re-election. Those were Richard Patteson, Troy Mills and Donna Dozier. Since there were no other candidates, Donna said the membership could vote by acclamation. Several voices made the motion to accept the members by acclamation, the first of whom was Mr. Charlie Colman. Mr. Terry Doyle seconded the motion, and all three members were returned for another two-year term.

## **VII. Questions, Answers and Suggestions by Residents**

Donna invited all the board members to come up and sit in chairs behind her at the front of the “stage” area so we might have a discussion with the membership present.

Donna said we usually begin our Question-and-Answer session with residents’ questions, but this time, before we get to that portion, she and the board wanted to discuss a rather unpleasant topic, (but a reality) that all members needed to know. The topic in need of discussion is that we ended our 2023 year with the lowest amount in our savings than we’ve had in years.

Donna said we did not get to that point by wild-eyed, profligate spending. Instead, we got there because we had to use our savings to pay for our expenses, which have continued to rise over the years. To put it simply, we had to pay out more than we took in.

Donna said the boards in recent memory have been proud of the fact that dues have NEVER been raised in the entire 30-plus years The Woods has been an HOA community. The dues have never changed.

She said she is told that \$300 annually is the least amount of any HOA in Tyler, and some have said, the lowest in all of Smith County. And, she said, don’t forget that most of our residents pay \$270 annually, by taking advantage of the 10% discount we offer.

Donna said she was not saying that because we are the lowest rate we should increase our dues to match what others do. She said the point is that

we don't want to be the HOA that falls into disrepair because we are stubborn and stick to the old ways, even though they don't mesh with the current economy.

The budget issues were caused by having to pay for things like an unexpected \$12,000 drainage repair bill at the end of 2022 early 2023. And, we were also \$15,000 over budget on tree costs.

Because of our shortfall, we have not been able to put money aside for the Reserve Fund, or savings. Our latest Reserve Study advises we have \$100,000 as our base, but we finished 2023 with about \$70,000.

We had to use funds from our savings to pay the bills the last couple of years. That's what those funds are for, of course, but now, we need to find a way to repay that money to ourselves, so we have the advised \$100,000 base.

At this point, Donna explained what a Reserve Study is: an assessment for capital planning, to provide direction as to where to spend money. Essentially, she said, it's a financial analysis of everything we are responsible to spend money on or pay for in our care.

The firm that performed our study estimated all costs, including replacement or major repairs that might be necessary. Examples of the elements they looked at were detailed and explained. Donna said the result was that we were found to be "in good general condition, and well maintained."

But, given our annual dues rate, our current level of funding is "not adequate to meet future needs." When we had a Zoom meeting with the engineer who prepared our Reserve Study, he recommended an increase in dues of \$10 per month, starting in 2022. That would have made the dues \$420 since 2022. But, Donna said that the board resisted this recommendation, in hopes that we could continue to meet our needs with the current rate for dues.

Donna said that our tree guy tells us he expects 2024 to see the same number of stressed trees in need of removal as last year, and that this

prediction is already coming true, with a large tree down in the street on January 10<sup>th</sup> on the Ridge Hill. Other trees by the pool have come down around that same time.

Donna said that since dues had never been raised to coincide with inflation we will be in the red by 2030 if we continue the way we're going; possibly even 2028 if things go like they did in 2023.

There are options, she said. One of those options is a special assessment of \$100 per household. The Reserve Study bases our number of units at 534. That would bring us another \$53,400 at our current rate of spending, boosting our savings to \$115,000.

Donna pointed out that she understands that no one wants to raise dues; not the residents and not the board. But, she said, she also understands we cannot keep up with today's costs on a 1990's budget in the 2020's, since we pay more for everything we use just like we all do in our own households.

Donna said that at least we can be thankful that our landscaper has not raised his rates at all since 2018, nor has our property manager raised her rates.

Donna explained that we are not going to vote on this tonight, but we want to discuss it. She said it would take the approval of 51% of residents present at a meeting, either an Annual Meeting or a special called meeting, to make that decision. Today, all we want is a discussion about a special assessment or a \$10 per month increase in dues.

Donna opened the floor for comments.

The board was pleased to have so many positive replies from those present, with everyone offering thoughtful supportive reasons showing that they understood the need and believed our rates were unbelievably low. One resident pointed out it's like we need a COLA (cost of living) increase for the budget to be viable.

After lengthy discussion, the board took other questions about drainage repairs needed at specific homes, and the process to go about getting approval to do that. The discussion circled back to the budget issues, and Donna pointed out that it would be helpful for all those in attendance to act as ambassadors for our discussion here, and to spread the word about our situation.

One resident said he was happy the board is proactive in taking care of the problem before it becomes a problem and is glad we're working to take action now. Everyone agreed we want to keep this neighborhood a premium place to live and keep our property values as elevated as possible.

Donna thanked the residents for their sincere contributions to the discussion and told them how grateful she was for their input and attendance. One of the residents praised the board and the session ended with applause for the board.

#### **VIII. Introduction of 2024 Board members**

This action was not necessary, since the members were re-elected by acclamation.

#### **IX. Adjournment**

President Donna Dozier asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Cheryl Troue made that motion, and Mr. Charlie Colman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Ronald D. Stutes*