

West Norwalk Association January 2020 Board Meeting

Date: January 7, 2020

Board Members in Attendance: Brian Forschino, Rob Notley, Anthony Carrano, Ken D'Arinzo, Stephen Galyas, Isabelle Hargrove, Kristin Clemens

Guests in Attendance: Dave Davidson, Lucy Dathan

The meeting commenced at 7:31pm.

Old Business

Holiday Party

Anthony commented to the board members and guests in attendance that, in his opinion, considering what we paid the Oak Hills Clubhouse Grille to host our 2019 Holiday Party, the staff did not do a very good job with preparing the main dining area. He believes that they should have put more effort into decorating the dining area for our party. The board members in attendance agreed with Anthony's comments.

Brian mentioned that we need to keep in mind that there is no other venue in West Norwalk that is willing to host our Annual Holiday Party at an affordable price.

Ken stated that, based on his observations, those who attended our Annual Holiday Party were having a good time and enjoying the food, drinks, and each other's company.

Anthony informed the board members and guests in attendance that fewer people attended the 2019 Holiday Party compared to our holiday parties from recent years.

Anthony also commented that this year, it was very challenging to properly allocate the money we received. For example, if an attendee made a payment via check for their 2020 dues as well as the entrance party fee, it was difficult to recall whether the check covers both the attendee's dues and entrance fee or solely their dues. The board members in attendance agreed that next year, we will need to take a different approach to tracking the money we receive at the door.

Anthony believes that the next time we ask the Oak Hills Clubhouse Grille to host one of our events, we should push harder for better food/drinks/service. While the board members in attendance agreed with this, they also agreed that if we choose to do this, we need to proceed with caution for fear that if we push too hard, the Oak Hills Clubhouse Grille will increase their price and we will end up in a situation similar as that of our relationship with LaKota Oaks.

Brian reminded the meeting attendees that our approach to the 2019 Holiday Party was different than our approach in 2018: in 2018, we told the owner of the Oak Hills Clubhouse Grille exactly what we

wanted, whereas in 2019, we provided the owner with a budget and he provided us with options that fit within our budget.

David Davidson commented that in the past, he and other guests were very impressed by Dolce's/LaKota Oak's presentation for the Annual Holiday Party (such as the atmosphere and the design/layout of the room). The board members in attendance agreed with David, and they briefly explained to David why our recent Annual Holiday Parties have not been hosted there.

Brian expressed a concern about a lack of venues in West Norwalk that would be a good choice for our Annual Holiday Party. Anthony mentioned that Chatham Manor may be an option to consider. Brian asked if Chatham Manor is located in West Norwalk.

Brian will relay feedback pertaining to the party to the owner of the Oak Hills Clubhouse Grille.

The board members and guests in attendance briefly discussed the Oak Hills Clubhouse Grille lease, and whether or not anyone knew if the restaurant owner is approaching the end of the lease. According to Brian, who knows the owner, the lease contains restrictions set forth by Oak Hills Golf Course that specifies whether or not the restaurant can be open, making it challenging for the owner to have a steady flow of customers.

Ken mentioned that the Double Tree Hotel may be a good option for future WNA events. The meeting attendees expressed concerns about the cost of renting a room at this venue.

Meeting House

Anthony provided the meeting attendees with an update on the meeting house, as some board members in attendance were not at our November meeting when Sarah Kline, the president of the Norwalk Meeting House Association, informed us of the state of the meeting house.

Isabelle suggested that we (the West Norwalk Association) join forces with the meeting house so we can help each other out.

Ken commented that when he attended a recent District E Democratic Town Committee (DTC) monthly meeting, Trevor Kline, son of Sarah Kline, was at the meeting and asked the DTC if they would make a donation to the meeting house. The DTC liked this idea, but feared that if they made a donation to the meeting house, they would be obligated to make donations for other associations in which DTC members are involved. According to Ken, several people at the DTC meeting asked why we (the West Norwalk Association) are not partnered with them.

Brian asked who owns the meeting house. The board members in attendance told him that the Norwalk Meeting House Association owns it.

Anthony reminded the board members in attendance that if Sarah Kline can get the town to classify the meeting house as a historic site, someone could buy the property and they wouldn't be able to change it. He also reminded us that we suggested to Sarah Kline that she send a mailing similar to the one the West Norwalk Association sent earlier this year.

Stephen informed the meeting attendees that the email blast we sent out in regards to the Norwalk Meeting House Association's fall/winter cleanup event helped them get several additional attendees at this event.

New Business

Treasurer Report

Anthony recently visited our P.O. Box, and there were a handful of dues payments. Stephen will add these records to our database, and Kristin will deposit the money into our account.

Kristin provided the meeting attendees with an update on our balance.

Stephen provided the meeting attendees with a breakdown of dues payments from 2018 and 2019.

While discussing the payments we made in December, Anthony asked why we are required to have insurance (which was one of the payments made). Ken and Brian informed the meeting attendees that we are required to be insured so we are covered if someone is injured at one of our meetings or events.

November Minutes

Stephen reviewed two sections of the November 2019 WNA Board Meeting minutes that needed clarification. The board members in attendance agreed upon these clarifications. Stephen will make the necessary changes and upload the minutes to our website.

WNA Outreach

Anthony asked David Davidson for his opinion on the best way to get in touch with retirees. David said that we need to remember that around the holidays, many retired people go to Florida and do not return to Norwalk until March or April. He suggested that if we want to get in touch with them, we wait until April to do so.

David also commented that most retirees have email addresses, so digital communication is a good way to stay in touch with them.

Anthony asked David about the effectiveness of the signs that are put out for our events. David said that they are effective.

When the board members in attendance began to discuss the WNA mailing from early 2019 and whether or not we plan to send a similar mailing this year, Ken stated that as Isabelle has said in the past, we need a solid answer to the following question: "what does the West Norwalk Association do that would make me want to pay my dues?". Ken said that, for example, by including a map of our plans for the upcoming year, people may be more willing to pay their dues if they know that they will be put to good use.

Isabelle asked how we spent this year's dues? Anthony said that we spent money on our Annual Meeting, Annual Holiday Party, insurance, our early-2019 mailing, and our Annual Holiday Party invitations.

David asked how many dues-paying members we have. Stephen said that in 2019, approximately 103 residents paid their dues.

Scholarship

Someone reached out to Isabelle and asked if the West Norwalk Association will be making a scholarship available this year. Isabelle asked the board members in attendance if we plan to do this.

Several board members in attendance believe that we should not do a scholarship because it never gets any recognition at the scholarship awards ceremony at Brien McMahon High School.

Brian commented that the last time we made a scholarship available, only 4 students applied, and one of them did not live in West Norwalk.

Isabelle commented that she believes the parents care more about the scholarships than the students.

Isabelle also commented that she believes we should be helping the “whole” rather than the “few.” She believes that, for example, a donation to Fox Run or buying a tree for the neighborhood would be more effective than a scholarship.

Anthony stated that making a scholarship available does not align with our mission statement. The board members in attendance agreed that a scholarship is not the most effective way to put money received via dues to use.

David commented that, like other groups/associations, the West Norwalk Association gets their largest turnout when there is a “threat” to the neighborhood (such as the New Canaan Traffic Regulation change). He asked if there are any “threats” that we should focus on. What is the community most concerned about? For example, the school district’s budget changes?

Anthony stated that the school district budget changes are out of our control, and that this would be an issue to be handled by the Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhood Associations (CNNA).

Anthony also stated that it is a good thing that there are no “threats”; this means that our neighborhood is safe.

Brian asked if we should send an email blast to West Norwalk residents asking them about issues and concerns they may have that they would like to bring to our attention.

Anthony reminded the meeting attendees that there is a spot for feedback at the bottom of our dues forms, and that very rarely does a dues form get returned with a concern listed in this section.

Ken informed David of an issue that was brought to the WNA’s attention in the past from residents in his neighborhood. Many residents said that they would attend our next meeting, which had this issue as one of the meeting topics, but only a handful of neighbors attended the meeting.

Isabelle expressed her concerns about the methods we are using to retain WNA involvement. Why are we spending over \$4,000 each year on events that have fewer attendees each year? (Isabelle does, however, support our social events that do not cost us any money, such as the 2019 Spring Social.)

David asked how many people are on our email blast list. Stephen said that there are about 450 email addresses on our email blast list.

The board members in attendance agreed that an email blast should be sent out to our email list asking neighbors to get in touch with us in regards to their issues and concerns. Stephen will draft said email and send it the board members for approval.

New Canaan Traffic Regulation

Anthony asked Lucy Dathan if any studies have been performed in regards to the traffic flow from CT-15 to Route 123. Lucy said that no such studies have been performed yet.

Lucy has asked people if there is a law that states that one town cannot do something that negatively affects another town, such as redirect traffic into another town. Her sources said that there is no such law.

Fox Run Pickup

Anthony stated that the Fox Run Pickup at the end of the school day is another traffic issue. The board members in attendance agreed that this is an issue.

Rob commented that parents/guardians are outside of Fox Run for almost an hour waiting for the kids to be let out for pickup.

Anthony noted that during the time of pickup, people are driving around cars on Fox Run Road that are waiting for their kids. It is only a matter of time before someone tries to drive around a parent's car and gets into a head-on collision, as they need to drive over the yellow line to get around these cars.

Brian commented that Highland Avenue is even worse than Fox Run Road.

Anthony asked Lucy Dathan who we can talk to in regards to this issue. She said that this is an issue that would need to be brought to the attention of the Board of Education. Anthony will send some info to Lucy so she can help us express our concerns about this issue to the right parties.

Isabelle recommended that people report this issue to the police, and that we should mention this issue in our next email blast and see if any residents agree with us.

Drainage Issues

According to Lucy, several residents have complained to her about drainage issues. Some of this was caused by the town delaying the installation of curbs after roads are repaved.

Spring Social

Anthony asked if we want to host a spring social. The board members in attendance agree that we should do this. The board members will discuss this during a future board meeting.

Earth Day Cleanup

Lucy informed the board members and guests in attendance that she will be hosting cleanup events on Earth Day. She asked if we would like to work with her to host one of these Earth Day cleanups in West Norwalk.

Anthony reminded the meeting attendees that very few people attended our 2019 Spring Cleanup.

Isabelle commented that in the past, more people attended our Spring Cleanup events when they were not hosted in conjunction with the citywide cleanup. She recommended that we host the cleanup later in the spring or early summer, when the weather is warmer. Anthony agreed, and likes the idea of hosting a neighborhood cleanup event in May.

Brian said that after our neighborhood cleanup event, we can tell the attendees to join us at Oak Hills Clubhouse Grille to mingle.

Kristin believes that more people will attend our cleanup if it is hosted on or near Earth Day.

Lucy said that if we would like to work with her to host an Earth Day cleanup in West Norwalk, the event could be held on Saturday, April 18th. The board members in attendance agreed with Lucy. The West Norwalk Association will work with Lucy to host an Earth Day cleanup on this date.

Lucy suggested that we ask the principal of Fox Run if he would be okay with us putting up a sign/poster at Fox Run to advertise the event. Anthony likes this idea.

Isabelle recommended that we also get in touch with the Fox Run PTO, as she thinks that it would be beneficial for us to be in communication with them and collaborate with them in the future.

Anthony asked if any board members in attendance know any of the Fox Run PTO members. Isabelle stated that she knows one PTO member.

The meeting concluded at 8:50pm.