

West Norwalk Association May 2020 Board Meeting

Date: May 4, 2020

Board Members in Attendance: Anthony Carrano, Stephen Galyas, Ken D'Arinzo, Ted Stepanoff, Brian Forschino, Rob Notley

Guests in Attendance: Bill and Betsy Wrenn, Bill Mitchell, Joe Valiante

This meeting took place via Zoom.

The meeting commenced at 7:32pm.

Old Business

P.O. Box

Anthony informed the meeting attendees that, since our previous board meeting, he went to the Post Office to reinstate the West Norwalk Association P.O. Box. This action would cost the West Norwalk Association \$175. Rather than pay the fee, Anthony suggested that, instead, we use a Private Mailbox (PMB), as this type of mailbox costs less than a P.O. Box. The board members in attendance agreed with this change.

Once we have opened a PMB and closed our P.O. Box, Stephen will update the contact information on our website.

Ken recommended that, once this is completed, we send an email blast to our email distribution lists to notify West Norwalk residents of this change.

Ken also recommended that we obtain a list of all residents that have paid their dues during the last few years and, if one of these dues-paying members is not on one of our email distribution lists, send them a letter that informs them of our change of address.

Ken asked if, following the closure of our P.O. Box, we can forward mail that arrives in our P.O. Box to our PMB. Anthony commented that he does not think we can do this once the P.O. Box has been closed.

Saint Matthew's Church

Anthony and Rob commented that the steel structure for the Saint Matthew's Church Recreation Center went up quickly. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no board members have any updates on the progress of the Recreation Center.

Ponus Ridge Middle School

Anthony commented that significant progress has been made on the Ponus Ridge Middle School remodel.

Rob commented that he has seen many workers at the school during the day.

Walking/Running

Recently, the West Norwalk Association sent an email blast that contained safety information for pedestrians and bikers, such as which side of the rode people should walk/ride on.

Ted, an active runner who recommended that we send this email blast to our residents, commented that he is concerned about people continuing to not heed the safety instructions, as someone may get injured if they are not careful.

Neighborhood Cleanup

Joe asked if the West Norwalk Association is planning to host a Spring Cleanup. Anthony informed Joe that originally, we planned to host a cleanup in conjunction with Lucy Dathan's Earth Day cleanup, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to cancel this event.

Ted suggested that we encourage people to bring a bag with them while they take a walk and pick up garbage. The board members in attendance agree with this idea.

Stephen will send an email blast about this suggestion.

New Business

LaKota Oaks

Recently, LaKota Oaks cleared land for a "farm" to grow crops (corn, grapes, etc.) that they can give to the public. The area that was cleared for the "farm" is between Weed Avenue and the ponds on the LaKota Oaks premises.

Rob and Anthony checked out the changes at LaKota Oaks.

Anthony spoke with the manager (Sam Hay) at LaKota Oaks. Sam informed Anthony that LaKota Oaks' intention is to plant crops for the neighbors to pick.

Anthony showed the meeting attendees a map of the LaKota Oaks property.

Anthony provided the meeting attendees with a brief summary of the restrictions currently in place for the LaKota Oaks property. In 2003, the previous owner of the LaKota Oaks property (Prudential) came to an agreement with the City of Norwalk and local residents (the Grant of Conservation Restriction) that classified the area of land between the ponds and the crest of the hill as a conservation area. This prevents anyone from building on this area of land. Following this, the previous owners of the LaKota Oaks property (BRCP) wanted to host celebratory events on the premises, but at the time, they were not allowed to do so. Thus, a Declaration of Restriction was signed in 2009 that permitted celebratory events on the premises, but an additional five acres of land was classified as a conservation area with the same restrictions specified in the Grant of Conversation Restriction document. The purpose of these two documents was to eliminate threats of the building of clustered housing on this land.

Anthony commented that the Declaration of Restriction states that forestry activity, which includes growing crops, is allowed on this land as long as the crops are not used for commercial purposes.

Bill Mitchell stated that he reviewed all provisions that can be performed by LaKota Oaks. He believes that no one can make an argument that what LaKota Oaks is doing (which is agricultural) is wrong.

Anthony reminded the meeting attendees that per the documents listed earlier, as long as LaKota Oaks does not sell the crops, they can have this “farm.”

Bill Wrenn commented that based on his reading of the document, this “farm” is not legal because it is a conservation easement. They cannot grow crops for farm-to-table restaurants (meaning that LaKota Oaks would be selling the food they grow to their customers via the meals people buy in their restaurant).

Bill Mitchell said that when he spoke to the manager of LaKota Oaks, he said that LaKota Oaks plans to give the crops away to West Norwalk residents.

Bill Wrenn stated that this is a conservation easement; it is meant to preserve land.

Bill Mitchell commented that the conservation easement can have a broader definition of the term “agriculture.”

Anthony said that the document specifies what is considered “forestry activity.”

Bill Wrenn said that it is up to the City of Norwalk to decide if this “farm” is allowed.

Ken asked the meeting attendees if any City of Norwalk employees are involved with LaKota Oaks’ “farm” project. Bill Wrenn stated that a letter was sent to the city.

Betsy commented that in 2003, several local residents worked with the owners (at that time) of the LaKota Oaks property so they can have celebratory events. The farm is not “beautiful” and the conservation easement says that this land must remain “beautiful.”

Bill Wrenn said that the only way to know what is legal is to have the City Conservation Commission look at the “farm.”

Anthony informed the meeting attendees that he will reach out to Mayor Rilling in regards to the “farm” and forward information about this issue to him.

Bill Wrenn commented that West Norwalk residents do not need to go and pick food from the “farm.”

Bill Mitchell reminded the meeting attendees that the manager of LaKota Oaks informed him that this “farm” would not be used commercially

Bill Wrenn said that the document states that LaKota Oaks cannot harm the soil. What if they use pesticides for their “farm”?

Anthony informed the meeting attendees that the manager of LaKota Oaks informed him that this act has been cleared with the city. Anthony warned him that he needs to make sure this is allowed before they make any more progress.

Anthony asked Bill Wrenn if he has spoken to the manager of LaKota Oaks about this issue. Bill Wrenn said that he has not.

Joe stated that this “farm” is close enough to the wetlands on the premises that LaKota Oaks would need approval from the city to build this “farm,” which means that they would have needed to speak to Alexis.

Bill Wrenn asked Anthony if we have a report about which material was being tested for in the soil via the testing wells on the property. Anthony said that he was told that the owners were compliant with this action. Bill Mitchell commented that the owners were testing for arsenic and that we never got a report, but that we can most likely ask for a copy of the report. Bill Wrenn believes that it would be a good idea to have a copy of this report.

Anthony commented that the manager of LaKota Oaks told him that land for this “farm” was over-cleared by accident and that they are going to let the over-cleared land behind the trees grow back into its natural state.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:31pm.