

UMBRELLA AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SPIRIT AND INVOLVEMENT REPORT - June 19, 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Umbrella Board asked the ad hoc Committee on Community Spirit and Involvement to “review ideas to promote community spirit and involvement.” It was clear to the committee that both Umbrella Board and residents could make changes that would enhance community spirit and involvement. With that in mind, the Committee identified two themes: Transparency/Improved Communication and Teamwork/We’re All in This Together. Committee recommendations include: regular Town Hall meetings of the entire community; more transparency in how Umbrella Board operates; emphasis on homeowners’ responsibilities to their associations; review and revision of welcome and orientation functions and materials; and a centralized, expanded newsletter. These and other recommendations are meant to promote unity and harmony throughout the community, increase positive energy and generate greater enthusiasm to become involved.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Over the past few weeks the ad hoc Committee on Community Spirit and Involvement has discussed hard questions such as: *Why do we hear comments like “We can’t get enough volunteers.” “No one is interested.” What changes would increase willingness to take a more active role in the community? Why do some residents not seek factual information or attend Board meetings and then grumble about how things are going? Why is attendance at Umbrella Board meetings (and some Village meetings) so low—unless a controversial topic is on the agenda? Do Board members and other volunteers feel unappreciated for the time they spend and work they perform? Whose responsibility is it to make our community the best it can be?*

The Committee had discussed questions like these even before recent events highlighted them. When the marketing plan was presented, homeowners came out in great numbers to respond to unpopular provisions and what they perceived as a “done deal” by Umbrella Board—a lack of transparency and fairness in deciding the plan. Yet how many homeowners had regularly followed Board decisions prior to the marketing presentations? The committee came to realize that the real issue is how to get everyone more involved. Each of us is important to the community and we have a golden opportunity right now to take an honest look at ourselves and make changes where necessary. The Committee is suggesting that we develop a culture where homeowners show respect and appreciation for board members and others who work hard for the association and where board members and others also show respect for homeowners, welcome their ideas and seek their help early and often in a collaborative way. The request for residents’ ideas in deciding our new logo may show that good changes have already begun.

Let us be clear. The Committee’s recommendations are not criticism of any board, past or present, nor any group or individual. Many people have contributed and continue to contribute their time and efforts, and they deserve our thanks. Many people are respectful of each other and work well together. What we’re proposing is a bit of tweaking that will inspire Providence Point’s highly intelligent, very talented and interesting residents to engage with the community at a higher level—to increase positive community energy and spirit. We have listed our recommendations under two closely related themes:

Transparency/ Improved Communication
Teamwork/ We’re All in This Together.

We strongly urge adoption of the recommendations and solicitation of interested residents in their implementation as soon as possible.

Theme 1. TRANSPARENCY/IMPROVED COMMUNICATION

- A. Decision-making transparency The suggestions below apply in particular to Umbrella Board and Committees. However, they may also apply to Village Boards and Committees.
1. When the Board has had work sessions prior to the board meeting, give homeowners a brief summary of the work session discussion if possible. Lack of discussion at Umbrella meetings leaves homeowners in the dark about reasons for a positive or negative vote.
 2. When documents are presented to the Board, provide documents to the audience (if feasible) or help them understand what the documents are. An outline or a list with descriptions could be helpful.
 3. Open the process of choosing Umbrella Committee members so it's transparent and all residents have an equal opportunity to be considered. For example: seek residents interested in serving on committees using all communication means--website, Manager's email, Channel 8, community bulletin boards (Town Hall, NCB, SCB, Clubhouse, etc.).
 4. Openly seek residents with special expertise through all communication means when such expertise is needed.
 5. Limit terms for all committee chairs and members.
 6. Select the numbers of women and men on each committee so that they generally reflect the community at large (approximately 80% women-20% men).
 7. Consider carefully the number of Umbrella committees. Standing Committees especially may become entrenched. Utilize special or ad hoc committees of limited duration rather than too many Standing Committees.
 8. Provide basic orientation for new Standing and Special committee chairs, using a standardized curriculum and experienced group facilitators (from the community where possible) to teach the curriculum. Include information about responsibilities, agenda building, handling conflict, etc.
 9. Consider the appropriate balance between resident committees and administrative staff.
 10. Expect Standing Committees to report at every Umbrella meeting. If there is no report several meetings in a row, perhaps that Committee is no longer necessary.
 11. Make agendas, meeting places, membership and minutes of all committees available for anyone who wants them. Put them on the website and provide other ways to access this information for those without computers.
 12. Open all committee and subcommittee meetings to residents interested in attending.
 13. Avoid rejecting a resident willing to serve on a committee. This sends the wrong message.
- B. Town Hall meetings.
1. Umbrella and/or Administration should bring residents together for community-wide Town Hall meetings several times per year.
 2. Make these meetings informal and well planned. Presenters should have appropriate qualifications and include residents where possible and/or outsiders depending on the topic. Panels may be a good choice for some topics.
 3. Overcome the issue of limited space by presenting the same material in two or three sessions. At least one session should be held in the evening. The committee does NOT favor Town Hall meetings by Village because the idea of Town Hall meetings is to bring us together as a community. (see Theme 2)
 4. Suggested format for Town Hall meetings: Brief presentation; informal time for questions as well as ideas and concerns; light refreshments and time to socialize.
 5. Suggested topics: Residents and Villages' requests/concerns; information on proposed changes or hard to understand issues; review of orientation information for everyone not just newcomers, especially after orientation has been revised (see Theme 2 A); recognition of volunteers. During one town hall meeting per year have a Volunteer/New Member Fair

where all organizations wanting to participate can provide information and recruit volunteers or new members.

C. Ideas to improve community-wide communication

1. Expand To the Point to include news of the community in addition to listing activities. Examples: regular columns from Umbrella President, all Villages, Administration, letters to the editor, humor, Maintenance, etc. Deliver the expanded newsletters through villages and the website to save postage. Appoint an ad hoc committee of interested residents to work out the details. Include editors of newsletters in Meadow & Forest Villages on the committee. For committee chair consider all residents with journalism experience [including Dena Klingler].
2. Develop a comprehensive community calendar available to all residents on line and on Channel 8. This should include every activity, class, scheduled/rented space, etc.
3. Post an ongoing list of the need for volunteers or members (boards, committees, clubs, etc.) using all communication means: website, Manager's email, Channel 8, community bulletin boards (Town Hall, NCB, SCB, Clubhouse, etc.).
4. Have sign-up lists available at all community and village functions.
5. Develop a professional looking booklet that lists ALL opportunities to participate in organizations, boards and groups in the community with their purpose, meeting times, member composition, etc. Make these available to all resident and update at least annually. To reduce costs, consider using expertise from staff and resident volunteers.
6. Continue to expand and improve the website, including interactive aspects. Include information from channel 8 on the website. Use a webmaster.
7. Provide wider announcement and reminders of Manager's weekly Channel 8 address.
8. When specific types of resident expertise are needed, seek volunteers by advertising the need using all communication means: website, Manager's email, Channel 8, community bulletin boards (Town Hall, NCB, SCB, Clubhouse, etc.). This will eliminate the need to ask residents to complete a skills and experience form.
9. Highlight an organization, club or Communiversities class monthly in the newsletter.
10. Publish articles in the newsletter at least twice a year highlighting community spirit and involvement. Emphasize positive aspects such as the opportunity to meet new and interesting people, make a difference, etc.

THEME 2. TEAMWORK/WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER/TEAMWORK

All homeowners are members of Village and Umbrella condo associations. We need to take responsibility for serving where we can, informing ourselves and making our voices heard.

A. Review and revise as needed all welcome and orientation functions and materials to create a more coordinated effort. *[SEE ALSO THE LRPC REPORT, SECTION II, BULLET 1]*

1. Link new residents with a current resident on the "buddy system."
2. Emphasize that "We're all in this together." Review the responsibilities of being a homeowner in a condominium association and the responsibilities of the homeowners association to its members.
3. Include an explanation of the community's governance structure.
4. If village residents are involved in disseminating welcome information, provide a script and possibly a checklist so all newcomers get the same information in the same way. Provide follow up to be sure every newcomer receives the information.
5. Include voter registration form with Victoria's orientation packet.

6. Present a welcome basket with gifts from area merchants and info about the area.
7. Periodically present orientation information at a Town Hall meeting.

B. Promote teamwork among all residents in the community.

1. Hold periodic town hall meetings to inspire community spirit and bring people together. (See Theme 1B for details.)
2. Have Umbrella President and Vice President be more of a presence in the community. He/she should communicate frequently to the community through such means as a regular column in To the Point, appearance at village board meetings, etc.
3. Possibly consider centralized governance with villages being primarily for social functions.
4. Plan for a place on campus that is large enough to hold the entire community and to provide space for plays and large group entertainers. Plans should include being able to divide the room for meetings and classes. (Note: We understand constructing a large room will be costly, but having such a space is a worthwhile goal and would make coming together much more pleasant. Start now to work through Endowment Fund Committee and Budget and Finance for funding.)
5. Invite a person from another village to a community or village event. Hold more social events across village boundaries (some already do this). Have a clearinghouse of ideas used by different villages. (For example: ideas or concepts for social parties.)
6. Accept renters as legitimate residents. They pay dues through their rent, are able to use all amenities and are eligible to volunteer in many capacities.
7. Consider a well-organized, well-trained, fun troupe of residents who can entertain and perhaps also inform at town hall or other meetings within the community. They could help bring us together in an ACTIVE, FUN way. Seek interested residents to develop this idea.

C. Promote teamwork at Umbrella and Village Boards and encourage residents to be informed about Board issues and decisions.

1. Each year provide community-wide orientation to all board members by experienced board members using a standardized curriculum. Include information about board goals, duties and responsibilities, Roberts Rules of Order, review of Declaration and Bylaws, etc.
2. Promote an attitude of mutual respect and cooperation between board members and residents in attendance at board meetings.
 - a. Show respect and appreciation to board members and other volunteers for the time and energy they devote to fulfilling board or other duties.
 - b. Show appreciation for resident comments made during designated comment period.
 - c. Allow written comments submitted at break or prior to the meeting for those who are reticent to speak up in public; read these aloud.
 - d. Educate residents about the guidelines for giving comments (courtesy, time limits, etc.), reasons for these guidelines and their source (e.g. Declaration).
 - e. If feasible, consider a straw poll of the audience before voting on some issues.
 - f. Change physical set-up so chairs are arranged in a more open, semi-circle where possible.
 - g. Recognize volunteers who serve on boards and committees at least once a year, possibly at a Town Hall meeting.

D. Purchase a sign for Forest Village that clearly shows Forest Village is part of Providence Point. Let's make it clear we are all part of one community! This is long overdue.