

Neighborhood News



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Neighborhood Leaders Group Sets Aggressive Goals

The Neighborhood Leaders Group has developed a strategic plan for activities it will undertake in the next three years. The strategic plan will make the most effective use of the time that these volunteers have to offer their communities. The plan outlines the goals that the group hopes to achieve and the activities it will take to reach those goals. It also defines the measurements that will evaluate progress toward goals.

Guided in the strategic planning process by Neighborhood Services Division Chief, Michelle Casciato, the group decided it would work towards the following goals:

- 1) Foster effective communication between communities and government by creating tools for non-HOA neighborhoods and continuously communicating county services within the community
- 2) Facilitate community improvement through education and outreach of lessons learned and community "best practices"
- 3) Improve neighborhood quality of life by identifying and fostering volunteer involvement in community and aesthetic projects and educating neighborhoods to handle problems internally.

To accomplish these goals, the Neighborhood Leaders will present programs at their group meetings to devise and implement strategies to engage volunteers, determine strategies to support the creation or strengthening of Neighborhood Watches, and develop community standards and methods for reinforcing them. A workgroup will create a publication of points of contact for county services. Another group will arrange and promote speakers for the Neighborhood Leaders meetings. Other

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Neighborhood University Class

"Running Effective Meetings"
Thursday, August 13, 7 - 8:30pm
Development Services Bldg
5 County Complex Ct, Room 202
Woodbridge VA 22192

Are you and meeting attendees frustrated by those who dominate group discussions or disrupt an agenda? The public is invited to join this session of the Neighborhood Leaders Group for training on conducting effective meetings. Special attention will be paid to techniques for managing disruptions, including how Roberts Rule of Order can provide structure and be adapted for any level of group formality.

The meeting will be held Thursday, August 13 in the Development Services Building, Room 202 from 7:00 – 8:30pm. This class is free, but to ensure ample handout materials please register by emailing nsd@pwcgov.org or calling 703-792-7018. For more information about the Neighborhood Leaders Group, please visit www.pwcgov.org/neighborhoodleaders.

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Neighborhood Groups

Dale City Leaders Conduct First Neighborhood Pride Week

By Connie Moser, Lindendale Community Group

Each year the annual Dale City Independence Day Parade draws more visitors. We estimate that more than 10,000 people line the streets of Dale Boulevard to watch the festivities. This year, with perfect weather, estimates were revised upward to 15,000 people.

Three years ago, I saw parade photos on the front page of the newspaper. I've forgotten the people who were featured, forgotten the caption of the photo, but I remember the graffiti in the background. That's what started me on a path to make a difference in my neighborhood and in my community.

Neighborhood Pride Week is an initial attempt to bring volunteers the possibility of empowerment. We all complain how bad our neighborhoods look. Here's a way to turn that around. We've chosen one week, the one before the parade, to show everyone who attends that we care about our community.

We have no funding and no professional equipment. Most of our volunteers have full time jobs and yet, look what we accomplished in this week! We sent letters to 140 residents on the parade route, telling them our purpose. We explained we were after more than the typical litter

pick up. We wanted neatly edged sidewalks and the gutters swept clean. The response has been overwhelming! Well over a hundred of those people showed pride in their community. That left our small band of volunteers free to trim and edge, shovel and sweep all the remaining walks and curbs.

We hope you not only appreciate the beauty we brought to Dale Boulevard, but will be inspired to step outside your daily routine to see what you can do to help your community.

Call me...I'll be glad to help you get started!

Editor's note: Connie Moser, Neighborhood Pride Week Coordinator, can be reached at 703-590-6662. Other leaders of this highly successful effort include Linda Gosnell (Glendale Community Group), Eric VanNortick and Ginger Kopecky (R Neighborhood) and Kelly Easterly (Chief of Staff for Supervisor John Jenkins). They were joined by many others.

More than 225 heavy bags of debris and litter were cleaned from the 2-1/2 miles stretch of Dale Boulevard. After the parade, a group staffed a booth to share information on county services. They recruited 20 new volunteers, added 23 people to email distribution lists and found 12 new Neighborhood Watch participants. Kudos came from Supervisor Jenkins, writers to the newspaper, and parade organizers. Absolutely awe-inspiring!



Volunteers Bill Moser and Ginger Kopecky trim low hanging branches on the walking path to Beville Middle School. This path is used by students walking to and from the school, as well as many pedestrians and bicyclists who travel along Dale Boulevard. The low hanging limbs posed a danger to cyclists and the overgrown foliage that was crowding the path made walking safely an adventure. The wild rose thorns and poison ivy were hazardous, and the heavy overgrowth prevented a clear line of sight from the school to the corner.

Neighbors Talking to Neighbors Builds Community Pride

*Common Interest Communities***Report on HB516 Seminar Presented by CAI**

On Monday, July 13, the Legislative Committee of Community Associations Institute (CAI) presented a seminar on HB 516. The seminar, hosted by Prince William County's Neighborhood Services, was attended by a balanced mix of HOA/condo board members, interested owners, and property managers. Speakers represented six association law firms and a management company. The new Common Interest Community Ombudsman, Heather Gillespie, also spoke.

Common Interest Community Board

In 2008, HB516 created a Common Interest Community (CIC) Board and the Office of the CIC Ombudsman. The CIC Board elected Pia Trigiani of Mercer Trigiani, LLP as Chairman. In her discussion of the Board's actions and accomplishments, Ms. Trigiani praised the speed with which the 11-member board has developed proposed regulations for property managers and management firms. The regulations include the requirement for companies to be licensed and that managers are to be certified or supervised by a certified manager. The CIC Board will set standards of conduct and practice for managers and certification will be through CAI. The regulations are under review and a public hearing took place August 3 in Richmond. The comment period is open until August 22. Ms. Trigiani and other speakers encouraged the attendees to review the proposal at <http://www.townhall.virginia.gov>.

The Office of the CIC Ombudsman

The Ombudsman, Heather Gillespie, spoke on the activities of the Ombudsman's Office. The office was staffed in mid-September 2008, and has received 994 phone calls, 744 emails and 259 complaints since then. Of the 259 complaints, 233 cases were closed and only 4 were found to require the attention of the CIC Board. Most complaints have been about Property Owners Associations (44%) and condominiums (23%), but 29% is from time shares. Only 1% of complaints are about management companies.

While 'emergency regulations' for the processing of complaints were adopted soon after legislation, final regulations are being drafted to go through the routine review process. It may be 18 months to 2 years before the regulations governing

the Ombudsman's Office are finalized. To be notified of progress on these regulations, register for emails on regulatory action at <http://www.townhall.virginia.gov>.

Guidelines for Submitting a Complaint

Ms. Gillespie asked that consideration be given to any complaints sent to her office. The complaints must come from a common interest community. The Ombudsman's Office cannot investigate blanket allegations - specifics are needed. The Ombudsman has no authority to act on anything that existed before July 1, 2008 and cannot offer legal opinions or interpretations. The Ombudsman has no enforcement ability. Ms. Gillespie stated that her office usually responds to questions within 24 hours, but asked that complainants allow more than a couple of days to receive an answer from her staff. Additionally, she requested that complainants not send documents electronically but in hard copy as it is resource-intensive to print all of the documents necessary to investigate a case. A fee is attached to complaints.

Impact of Licensing on Associations

The educational courses and licensing requirements will cost the managers and companies who must now be regulated. It is likely that these expenses will be passed along to associations in higher contract fees. However, associations are assured of a better quality of manager. Owners will also have more venues through which to address issues with management.

For More Information

If you missed this seminar, mark your calendar for the PWC HOA & Condo Leadership Seminar on Friday, September 18, 2009. CIC Board Chairman Pia Trigiani will be a featured speaker. Look for registration information in mid-August.

CAI offers education and resources to the volunteer board members of CICs; see CAI Community Governance Help at <http://www.caionline.org/info/help/Pages/default.aspx>. The local chapter of CAI is the Washington Metro Chapter: <http://www.caidc.org>. The web site for the Office of the CIC Ombudsman is http://www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/cic_liaison.cfm.

Join the Neighborhood Leaders Group; www.pwcgov.org/neighborhoodleaders

R Neighborhood Persists, Succeeds

Since its formation 2-1/2 years ago, the Ridgedale neighborhood group has worked on an action plan. "R Neighborhood" is finally seeing results, due to the persistence of a handful of people.

Ridgedale residents attended a community meeting in January 2007, hosted by Neighborhood Services. Interested residents continued to meet with the county agency to identify concerns and to create an action plan. The group chose to refer to themselves as "R Neighborhood," reflecting the feeling of pride and ownership in their Dale City community. They agreed on three goals:

- 1) Establish a Neighborhood Watch program
- 2) Pursue the installation of traffic-calming stop signs
- 3) Suggest to Coles District Supervisor Marty Nohe the location of five new streetlights within Ridgedale

Processes to establish Neighborhood Watch and to have the stop signs installed required petitioning hundreds of neighbors. The street lights are allocated by each supervisor at the rate of only five per year. But due to their persistence, R Neighborhood overcame process hurdles and now has two sets of stop signs, five street lights and four (soon to be five) Neighborhood Watches!

Group leader Eric VanNortwick maintains an email list through which he distributes community improvement information. The active members of R Neighborhood regularly attend the Neighborhood Leaders Group and Neighborhood Watch Crime Prevention meetings. They and others have mowed grass, trimmed bushes, removed graffiti and picked up trash, "all with the intent of making R Neighborhood a better community," says Eric. Many of the group were involved in the Neighborhood Pride Week efforts that cleaned sidewalks and gutters and trimmed plants along Dale Boulevard in preparation for the Fourth of July parade.

It is noteworthy that all of this work was done by just a few people. "This is not an HOA," Eric wrote to his neighbors. "This is simply a group of concerned citizens volunteering their time trying to improve our neighborhood." R Neighborhood is a better place due to their hard work and persistence. Congratulations - you serve as a model to us all!

Thanks to Eric VanNortwick for providing material for this article.

(Strategic Plan, from p. 1)

workgroups will create a "speakers bureau" for community meetings, assist with the neighborhood conference, and create a template for communities to use to survey the needs and desires of their residents.

The Neighborhood Leaders Group has already accomplished several items in this year's list of activities. They have distributed thousands of copies of Neighborhood Service's "common violations" pocket folder, created suggestions for welcome packets to be used by neighborhoods and have supported the development of community web sites through an educational program and individual tutoring.

Homeownership Preservation Event

On August 27th, Hope Now Alliance is planning a Mortgage Preservation Workshop at the Hylton Chapel, 1:30 - 8:00 p.m. At this event, families who are currently having trouble paying their mortgage and are facing foreclosure. Homeowners will be able to sit down with their lenders and other loan associations/organizations, such as HUD, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, to discuss alternatives to avoid foreclosure. Attendees should bring relevant income and expense information. More information can be found on the following websites:

Hope Now Alliance www.hopenow.com

Neighbor Works www.nw.org

If you or someone in your neighborhood is having trouble paying a mortgage, nothing is worse than doing nothing. Call the Homeowner's HOPE™ Hotline at 1-800-995-HOPE.

County Clean Ups

County Clean Ups are Saturdays from 8:00pm to 12:00pm. For more information, visit www.pwcgov.org/junk.

September 5 - Yorkshire, Manassas
October 3 - Marumsc Plaza, Woodbridge

For more information, please call 703-792-7018