

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

March 2018

The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it.
-attributed to George Orwell and Selwyn Duke

Summer House Owners:

In my last letter, I asked owners to take a survey so that they could express their individual and group opinions to the Board, and so that the Board could hear those messages. The response rate was poor, clearly short of anything that could be regarded as statistically significant.

There were, however, a few points of general agreement. First, the respondents are opposed to special assessments except in the most extraordinary circumstances. Secondly, most respondents believe that fees are reasonable but should not be increased. Third, quite a number of respondents expressed specific ideas about where additional funds should be spent or additional services added. I'll return to this topic later in the letter.

With respect to landscaping, more than half of the respondents thought the landscaping company was doing a good job, but a significant minority thought the landscapers did a poor job either generally or in specific areas of the property.

With respect to rules enforcement, nearly everyone thought the rules themselves were reasonable, and those who thought them unreasonable suggested changes that are outside the Board's authority under our governing documents or violate Florida law. A significant minority of survey respondents believed that the rules are selectively enforced, although no one cited any evidence for their belief.

When asked what matters the Board should address, the very few suggestions made largely discussed issues that are actually outside the purview of the Board. To the extent such suggestions were within Board authority, they advocated spending more money on items designed to enhance the respondents' individual properties, not community-wide issues. Some Beachside owners expressed open opposition to any capital expenditures on the Golfside. Note: it's one property.

Bottom Line #1: the survey yielded limited signal amongst the noise and there was little interest among the broad membership in expressing their opinions.

Bottom Line #2: it's pretty clear that owners are unfamiliar with our governing documents, the governing statutory framework and the division of duties those limitations impose on the Board and the Staff.

Reading the general sense of the respondents, they want more and better services, faster construction, more staff and more capital improvement projects without having to pay anything additional in exchange. In an ideal world, that would be great. Who wouldn't be in favor of such a result? In the real world, it doesn't work that way.

Not one survey respondent in their comments [and most commented on a number of topics] who advocated for additional services or projects even briefly mentioned a possible funding source. Every owner is provided a budget. Our balance sheet is available upon request. The Board would undoubtedly jump at the opportunity to provide additional services and projects if we could identify funding sources for them.

So, here's where we are left as a Board. Let's assume for a moment that the survey results are an accurate reflection of the thinking of the membership, a proposition about which I am personally unsure. We are being asked to provide more services and capital projects without additional funds. Since it is not possible to spend money we don't have, we have no choice but to balance our funds with our needs, prioritize both operating and capital project needs, and do the best we can within the parameters we can't change. That's what we have been doing and what we will continue to do.

Criticism can be a useful tool. It is not useful when it misapprehends or ignores the context in which decisions must be made.

Here's my message to the owners: Each Board member has a duty to you, but it is not to do whatever you, as an individual, ask us to do. Our responsibility runs to the entirety of the owner/members of our organization. We are obligated to make decisions and spend our available funds in rational ways designed to create reasonable benefits for the entirety of the membership to the maximum extent possible. If you want to advocate for a certain service or project, the Board will listen, but we will listen with an ear geared toward balancing the interests of all owners and we will need to hear an explanation of where we get the money.

I look forward to your constructive input.

As always, thanks for your trust and support.

Our touchstone: preserve and improve our property.

Sincerely,



Joe Gill