

Minutes of the Meeting of The Grove Architectural Review Committee on March 7, 2024

Committee members in attendance: Mike Meyer (Chairman), Shirle Mabie, Marge Lashay, Janice Garland

Grove HOA board member in attendance: ARC Liaison Ellery Hathorn

Not in attendance: Bill Stone

Mike Meyer opened the meeting and thanked everyone for their participation and with special thanks to Marge Lashay for generously making her house available for our gathering. All members agreed that we should try meet at least once per year to discuss important business, review past action items and share ideas.

We reaffirmed our main purpose, namely for the ARC to uphold high standards for every homeowner's property in terms of landscaping and physical exteriors in an effort to maintain and improve property values in The Grove.

The first item we discussed was the new ARC mailbox slot. This was approved by the board and installed today next to the community bulletin board at the west gate entrance. It is clearly labeled "ARC Returns." Residents can now place their application in the locked drop box and extend the plastic flag to alert the ARC of a new application. Blank forms will be stored inside the mailbox's front lid as well as at the guard house.

As always, residents can continue to download and submit applications online and via email.

We discussed that this week a homeowner took the decision to cut down two mature oak trees on his property without applying for ARC approval. Mike Meyer informed the committee that Sentry Management already sent the owner a violation letter informing him that he needs to submit an application (after the fact), remove the trunks with a stump-grinder and replace the areas with shrubs, new trees or sod.

Mike Meyer noted that the tree service company that performed the work also limbed two oaks toward the front side of the property and that they were cut incorrectly in such a way that makes the tree very vulnerable to disease.

For this reason the ARC committee proposed that the board should add language to our bylaws that all tree work done in The Grove must be performed by contractors who are ISA certified arborists.

This led to a discussion about the importance of trees in our neighborhood, how they create a special character to The Grove, and how it's possible that even long-time homeowners may not be fully aware of the rules and regulations relating to exterior changes to their property.

The ARC therefore proposes that the board approve sending a mailing (physical and email) to all homeowners to serve as a helpful fact sheet summary of exterior property do's and don'ts along with an acknowledgment page to be signed and returned. We feel this should clear up confusion about what actions need ARC approval. With the board's OK, the ARC will prepare a draft document for final review.

Some members asked what tools the HOA has beyond sending violation notices through Sentry Management to enforce the HOA's rules in cases when a property owner disregards them and especially with regard to cutting down trees without written approval. Ellery Hathorn said that the HOA has the power to place a lien on a property in certain circumstances but this would require legal action.

We discussed what measures can be taken to add “teeth” to the ARC rules, such as issuing fines in case of a flagrant violation that cannot be corrected or where correction is ignored. Mike Meyer explained that a fining committee and fining structure would have to be approved and organized by the board (subject to Florida statutes.) All ARC members were in favor of this.

The next topic on our agenda was fencing. Recently an application was submitted by a potential home buyer to add a metal fence but it was subsequently withdrawn. The majority of committee members recommend to the board should vote to prohibit any kind of physical fencing within The Grove - be it for pet containment or privacy - and to add specific language to our bylaws to that effect. The ARC believes that the friendly and open feel of our neighborhood without fences should be upheld. ARC members also recommended that invisible fences should be exempted and should not require ARC approval since there is no visual change in property appearance. One member felt that fences should not be totally ruled out if there are clear guidelines in place.

We then opened the discussion to the idea of creating a color palette book to help homeowners when selecting exterior paints for color schemes that are in keeping with existing homes in The Grove. The majority of members felt that a list of pre-approved colors is not necessary at this time. However we underscored the fact that any house that is being painted, even in its existing colors, always needs to be approved by the ARC and that color swatches must be submitted whenever new colors are being proposed.

We also proposed that the board allow a member of the ARC to ride along with Michelle Pogue from Sentry Management during her monthly HOA drive-through. Shirle Mabie volunteered.

The ARC agrees with the HOA board that ARC members should continue to monitor and take note of properties and common areas that are in need of improvement or repair. In many ways we are the eyes and ears of the community.

In that spirit, Shirle Mabie proposed that the board consider a small beautification project at the entrance of the golf cart path by adding a pair of containers where seasonal plants can be grown. She also proposed erecting a small sign at the exit that says Welcome to The Grove at Harbor Hills.

There being no other agenda items, Mike Meyer called the meeting adjourned.