

Investing in the Future of Western Oaks

Andy Hathcock, Vice-President of the WOPOA Board of Directors

When Valinda and I moved to Western Oaks seven years ago, one of the things that attracted us was its “neighborhoodiness” (if that is a word). People take the time to get to know each other and to look out for one another. The residents of Western Oaks care deeply about our neighborhood and our neighbors. Another thing that sets Western Oaks apart from other neighborhoods are the amenities: the swimming pool, the tennis courts, the charming playground, the spacious greenbelts, and the beautiful and stately oak trees.

Last year Western Oaks turned 40 years old. Most of the amenities we have been enjoying were built around the time that Western Oaks was created. It is time to face the fact that our decades-old infrastructure is in need of replacement and renewal.

Most of us live in houses that are about the same age, and over the years many have replaced roofs, windows, HVAC systems, appliances and the like. Many homes have been renovated inside and out. Responsible homeowners know that these things are necessary to maintain their homes in good order and to maintain the value of their property. Likewise, maintaining and renewing our amenities keeps our neighborhood in good order and maintains the value of our investment in our homes.

For example:

Our beloved vintage playground equipment is reaching the end of its useful life. The carousel, the metal slide, the monkey bars are all irreplaceable because they don't make stuff like that anymore. A brand new playground might not have the same charm, but will be safer and equally fun.

The restrooms at the swimming pool are in desperate need of renovation. 40 years' worth of changes in building codes and laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act will require a major reconfiguration. But the restrooms will be far more pleasant to use!

The concrete aggregate decking around the pool is cracked, rough on the feet, slippery when wet, and scorching hot on summer afternoons. Wouldn't it be nice to replace that with a nonskid decking that stays cool and comfortable to walk on?

We spend thousands each year maintaining tennis courts built on 40 year old asphalt that has become as cracked and brittle as dried-out Playdoh. A concrete overlay would create a new durable playing surface that would be far cheaper than the cost of constantly patching the old one.

Over the past several months, there have been gatherings throughout the neighborhood where folks have had the opportunity to express their feelings about the amenities, their priorities for the neighborhood, and their vision for our future. People have participated in polls and conversations on Nextdoor, and there have been presentations and discussions at the last two annual meetings.

We have an all-volunteer Capital Improvement Committee that has spent hundreds of hours over many months examining the state of our amenities and researching replacement costs. We have all-volunteer committees dedicated to each amenity, who have identified areas of need and made recommendations for action. The Board also commissioned a separate professional reserve study to examine all the amenities from an engineering and financial planning perspective. The results of both the Capital Improvement Committee's work and the reserve study are remarkably similar: it will take an additional investment of \$3000 per household over the next five years to build a replacement fund sufficient to renew and revitalize our existing amenities. This translates to \$50 per month per household for five years.

It is the current Board's intention to submit for approval of the WOPOA homeowners a proposal for a special assessment to raise a dedicated replacement fund to replace and renew the existing amenities. Such funds could not be used for any other purpose by this or any future Board, and the assessment could only be collected for the maximum period authorized by homeowners. Any single capital improvement expenditure over \$3000 would also have to be approved by a second vote of the homeowners. This “Texas two-step” insures that the money raised would be spent only as intended.

If we had started saving 40 years ago, we would have the funds on hand today to do all the necessary work, but we can't go back in time and change the past. What we can do is plan and take action for the future. And the longer we delay, the more expensive it gets.

You may be thinking, “I don't use any of these amenities. Why should I pay for something I don't even use?”

First, even if you never swim, never set foot on a tennis or basketball court or ballfield, and don't have children or grandchildren who use the playground, you personally benefit from the existence of these things. They all contribute to the market value of your home because they are very attractive to prospective home buyers. Second, and in my judgment more importantly, they contribute to the character of the neighborhood; they promote social interaction and make Western Oaks what it is. When people gather at the pool or the playground, or meet on Wednesday evenings for the tennis doubles league, we are socializing, getting to know our neighbors better, and forming closer community bonds. And ultimately it is the people who make Western Oaks such a wonderful place to live, so “neighborhoody.”

The Board will be reaching out to all homeowners over the next several weeks, to listen, to answer questions, and to seek your support for an important special assessment vote this fall. There will be a neighborhood meeting shortly after school starts when everyone can come together to offer input into the capital improvement plan.

At the end of this process we will have revitalized amenities that we can all enjoy and be proud of for the next 40 years!

GOOD TO KNOW

If you need to create an account on the neighborhood portal but do not know your account number, you can get help from customer service at service@ciranet.com.

If you have questions, comments or complaints regarding the installation of Google Fiber, you can contact them directly by phone at (877)454-6959 or by email at fiber-construction-support@google.com