

Minutes
Springfield Civic Association Meeting
March 20, 2012
Crestwood Elementary School

OPENING. President Bruce Waggoner opened the meeting at 7:30PM with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Scoutmaster Joe Silver and four of his Cub Scouts in uniform serving as the flag's honor guard.

Executive Committee Members Present (Board of Directors, Committee Chairs and Two Immediate Past Presidents):

President Bruce Waggoner	Treasurer Rich Duffy
1 st Vice President Michele Duell	Director at Large Gail Nittle
2d Vice President Merry Macke	Director at Large Bonnie Pritchard
Secretary Alice Merrill	Hospitality Chair Sandy Frieswyk

ATTENDANCE. 1st VP's count: 68.

ANNOUNCEMENTS. President Bruce Waggoner made all announcements except those noted as made by others.

Mar 21, 6:30PM: Franconia Government Center, Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting: Director at Large Gail Nittle said the CACs provide a monthly opportunity for dialogue with the FCPD about neighborhood safety matters. This meeting's speakers are from by Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit followed at 7:30 by Q&A with Franconia District Police Commander, Captain Shawn Bennett and staff. Come on out, get informed, get answers to your questions on safety issues in the county and your neighborhood.

Apr 1, 6PM: Easter Pageant at Immanuel Bible Church. Director at Large Bonnie Pritchard put free tickets on the check-in table and said performances are always SRO, so come early since empty seats are opened to those without tickets at 5:45.

Apr 14, 9-12AM: Volunteer cleanup at Lake Accotink Park. Don your yard duds and come out to help.

Apr 17, 7:30PM Special SCA Membership Meeting, Grace Church: Director at Large Gail Nittle said this meeting will offer a panel of realtors to explain how Springfield is doing in the market relative to other local areas, how to make our neighborhoods more attractive to buyers, how to improve our properties. The check-in table will have index cards for listing your questions for the realtors.

Apr 21, 10AM-2PM: Crestwood School PTA President Jennifer Kilmer announced their yard sale, bake sale and a silent auction for an SSRC membership, a balloon ride, and a 4 day/3 night Las Vegas stay. Vendor table space fee is \$10.

Apr 21, 10AM-2PM, Vienna Community Center: Health and Wellness Fair for Baby Boomers and Beyond including walks and other activities. Past President Al McAloon passed this along as a type of activity available for seniors on issues like health, housing, legal, financial, transportation, aging well and caregiving that are listed at website <www.SeniorNavigator.org>.

Apr 25, scheduled opening of Chick-Fil-A restaurant on Backlick Road by Outback Steakhouse.

May 15 regular SCA Membership Meeting: Election of SCA's 2012-13 Board of Directors followed by our annual "Report from the Hill" by our elected state and local representatives. Cards will be at the check-in table for questions you'd like speakers to address.

June 2: Springfield Days' 3d Annual Springfield 15K/5K race. Proceeds (more than \$9000 last year) go to local recreation and fitness programs for underserved youth. To help grow this community event and its proceeds for youth in need, take a race reminder card from the check-in table, mark your calendars, and register to run/walk, volunteer to help, or attend to cheer for the runners.

July: The ten-year Springfield Mall redevelopment begins. All stores except the anchors are to be out by June.

NOMINATIONS FOR ELECTION of 2012-13 BOARD OF DIRECTORS. Secretary Alice Merrill, 2012-13 Nominating Committee Chair, read the slate of nominees. All Directors except herself are willing to continue in their present positions. She asked for relief to due vision diagnoses, and member Debbie Mays generously offered to serve. Alice asked for additional nominations from the floor for any/all positions (none made). She'll accept members' nominations for all positions by phone or email until mid-April. Thereafter, the slate will be published in the May newsletter for election at the May meeting.

TREASURER'S REPORT. Rich Duffy gave the report, copy at Encl 1. Ending balance \$5268.95. 129 dues-paid households, 62 new, 67 renewals.

NEW BUSINESS. 1st VP Michele Duell introduced Danny Forshee and John Comiskey, Fairfax County Department of Code Compliance (DCC) Investigators, who've come to explain the kind of work that DCC does and how complaints are prioritized. She said that the information to be included when reporting complaints is contained in the current newsletter, that she'll collect index cards during the meeting listing the questions you'd like answered, but that we'll not be discussing issues at specific addresses.

Mr. Forshee and Mr. Comiskey provided the information that follows.

DCC investigates most neighborhood quality of life (QOL) complaints in the county, including parking in the grass, junk in the yard, too many people living in a home, uncut grass, building without permits, and hoarding. Enforcement of Zoning (including blight, grass, noise (not dogs), Property Maintenance, Unpermitted Building, VA Uniform Statewide Fire Prevention, and Health codes, previously managed by a number of different agencies and systems, is now consolidated in a single department. All DCC investigators are familiar with all those codes and each investigator is certified in two or three of them.

DCC has four major areas of interest:

- Life Safety issues like smoke alarms, emergency egress.

- Neighbor/Community Satisfaction, i.e., are you happy in your community (e.g., you're not having to drive through a neighbor's trash or having other QOL problems)?

- Education, through talks like this and feedback to you on complaints.

- Compliance with county codes.

Their work starts on receipt of a complaint. Don't be afraid to list your contact info when reporting a complaint. It's not required, but it lets them give you feedback on your complaint and, by law, they can't reveal it. When complying with FOIA requests, complainant's contact info is redacted from material that's released.

Investigators research site plans and can go to a magistrate just like the police do to get an inspection warrant when needed to address a violation. Complaints of unsafe conditions always receive highest priority, and if such conditions are found, DCC can prevent further use of the property until the violation is cleared. A Notice of Violation is posted on the door and, if there's no appeal, the case is sent to the County Attorney for Circuit Court action. Complaints are against the property, not the owner, and are made a part of the land records. DCC does follow-up to ensure correction within 24 hours for minor matters and up to 30 days when major work is needed, although that period can be extended. If the owner appeals the DCC finding, DCC doesn't enforce correction until after the appeal process is completed, so be patient on resolution of some complaints. It can take six months following appeal for an owner to get a request for special permit or exception granted/denied.

Examples of types of complaints are commercial food storage in a freezer in a back yard, restaurant appliances and furniture stored in a back yard, an unpermitted and uninspected basement bedroom with no or inadequate windows, a home's hallway that's less than 3 feet wide. While an owner can get permits after the fact, it might require cutting holes in drywall so investigators can see the electrical and plumbing installations behind it.

Some life safety examples are missing spindles from a deck railing or flammable material by a furnace. In the latter case, DCC found the violations and evacuated the residents in the nick of time. The next slide they showed was of that house following a fire. Their inspection and evacuation order likely saved some lives.

Violation trends in Lee District (many of these were found by investigators when checking complaints on other issues):

- Grass height (12" and up) – 411 complaints last year.

- Unpermitted work – 256 complaints, e.g., electrical extension cord strung to a device inside a shower, extra circuit breaker added to the box. Many violations are found when investigating a complaint on another issue. The more details you can give in your complaint, the better.

- Multiple Occupancy/Rooming House – 222 complaints on life safety issues like inadequate emergency egress, no smoke detectors, electrical hazards, but not all were founded. If there's enough square footage in bedrooms for the number of people living there, there's nothing they can do. On these complaints, they like to know what time to find most people home; the number alleged to live there and their relationships if known; the people observed (men, women, only adults/only kids/both), i.e., could a day care business be operating there?; how people enter the house (front door, back entrance, through the garage).

Life safety issues with emergency egress, smoke detectors, and other fire hazards such as wire being run through the door threshold– 161 complaints last year. There are minimum window height and width requirements (5.7SF) and minimum sill height (44" from floor). Small basement windows near the ceiling do not meet code minimums for safety. When receiving a complaint, they like to know how dangerous the situation might be. Note that smoke detectors are required based on the code at the time the house was built, e.g., an old house needs to have a detector installed outside each sleeping area plus one on each level.

Unsafe structures like damaged roofs, hoarding, too heavy a load on a floor, a house collapsing -- 123 complaints last year. Before a structure can be designated as blighted, it must be vacant for a minimum of one year.

In life safety and unsafe structure cases, DCC orders occupants to evacuate until the problem is cleared. If occupants return before the violation is cleared, they can be arrested for trespassing. DCC notifies the police and fire departments of the violations because conditions could be unsafe for them to enter or egress. In these cases, DCC likes to know how dangerous the situation seems, whether availability of emergency escape appears inadequate.

Multiple Dwelling – 37 complaints last year. DCC likes to know whether there's a basement door padlocked from the upstairs, a second kitchen downstairs, two families living there, separate entrances, inadequate bedroom square footage or window egress.

Other Zoning Issues: 125 complaints

Inoperable or commercial vehicle parking – 40 complaints last year. They'd like details such as location of the vehicle, whether it's a private or commercial vehicle, operable or inoperable. An inoperable vehicle (flat tire or other disabler) that is screened from view (e.g., with a car cover) is not in violation, but if not screened from view, it's in violation. Having 20 operable vehicles parked in the back yard is ok, but having 20 inoperable vehicles unscreened from view in the back yard is not ok; it's a junk yard.

Outdoor storage and setback issues – 15 complaints. Sheds 8.5 feet tall or less can be put anywhere in a side or back yard, but sheds 13 feet high, e.g., must be 13 feet from the rear property line and not closer to the side lot line than the minimum required side yard setback for the lot. Sheds made into workshops are subject to different height size and setback limitations.

Businesses operated in residences – 89. Home businesses are ok as long as they have a home-based business permit. If permitting is in doubt, they'd like to know time of day the business operates, whether there are business employees, and whether business items are stored inappropriately. There could be more than one type of violation involved.

The DCC has five teams of five inspectors each. When you submit a complaint, give it 60 days to get to the County Attorney (if it goes that far) who gives the owner 21 days to respond. If the owner then requests a special exception from the County Board of Supervisors or a special permit for a clear violation, the time for resolution moves up to seven months to a year.

Violations that are not common in Lee District:

- Hoarding
- Blighted, deteriorating, or grossly unmaintained houses
- Junk yards/storage yards/outdoor storage issues
- Construction noise and other mechanical noise violations

Issues that DCC cannot address:

Yard waste or falling/fallen trees. That includes trees cut down and left in the front yard; wood is considered fuel (whether it's being used as such or not), and the resident may not be deprived of fuel for the home.

Piles of firewood for personal use.

Issues addressed by the Police Department, not DCC:

Barking dogs, loud parties, graffiti, inoperable vehicles when no other violations are visibly present.

How to make a complaint to DCC:

Call 703-324-1300 or go to their website: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/code to submit the information requested on the DCC Complaint Form (copies available at check-in desk). If you key in a street address on their website, you can get a list of complaints about that address. If a complaint case goes to court and the judge upholds the violation, the owner has 30 days to clear it. DCC follows up to check and, if the violation is not cleared, the owner can be fined or jailed. But occupants do not have to let DCC investigators in the house. For example, if the husband says come in and his wife says no, her "no" trumps his "yes" and the investigator has to

leave, so the complaint may remain unresolved for denial of the ability to investigate. However, if the complaint involves an obvious life safety or unsafe structure issue, they can, as stated earlier, go to the magistrate and secure an inspection warrant to enter despite the owner's objection. They left some DCC handouts on the check-in table for us to take-home.

CLOSING.

President Bruce Waggoner thanked our speakers for their excellent briefing, noting that the take-home message for us is to keep our eyes and ears open and show we care by reporting the little things in our neighborhood that don't look right in order to prevent big bad things from taking root. When observing things that don't look right, like broken windows, anarchy symbols painted on structures, inoperable vehicles parked in plain sight, commercial vehicles parked in prohibited areas, properties or activities that look unsafe and so forth, report it to the appropriate agency, DCC or the police, for corrective action. Our guests this evening have given us a wealth of information on what to look for.

We received another wealth of information during a prior meeting when the FCPD Traffic Enforcement Division explained how to spot and report commercial parking violations. In that regard, Bruce said he had some good news. Supervisor McKay and VDOT are working on the commercial parking violators we reported on Brandon Avenue, Bland Street, and by Marriott. They've heard us and are responding, but it's a process and will take time to resolve.

He thanked the Board of Directors and Committee Chairs for producing an excellent edition of the newsletter in preparation for our guest speakers this evening and thanked Yard Signs Manager Kurt Doehnert for reminding members to post their meeting signs to remind residents to come out to hear tonight's presentation.

He said another prime example of keeping our eyes and ears open and taking action was member Diane Boughton's learning of the Park Authority's destaffing of Lake Accotink Park from Jan-Mar this year without even consulting with the communities surrounding the park. Trying to prevent a future recurrence, she took the initiative to express to the County Board of Supervisors our community's displeasure with that action, and he thanked Diane for her efforts on our behalf.

Tonight's door prizes are from Thai Café at 6701 Loisdale Road and Metro Run and Walk on Commerce Street. Since Debbie Mays secured the Thai Café prizes, Bruce asked her to pick the winning names from the pot. Prizes and winners are:

- Three \$50 gift certificates to Thai Café -- won by Gail P., Shawn McP., and Sue S.
- Two \$20 gift certificates from Metro Run & Walk – won by Joe S. and Shawn McP.

ADJOURNMENT. Bruce Waggoner adjourned the meeting at 9:15PM. Next meeting is the Special Membership Meeting with realtors on April 17th at Grace Church.

Respectfully,

/s/
Alice Merrill
Secretary

Encl:
Treasurer's Report

Springfield Civic Association

Treasurer Report

1/18/2011 through 03/20/2012

Starting Balance		\$5,848.04
INCOME		
SCA Member Dues	125.00	
Donations	30.00	
Business Income	160.00	
TOTAL INCOME		315.00
EXPENSES		
Hospitality	25.50	
Printing and Reproduction (Business)	181.80	
Postage and Delivery (Business)	93.79	
PO Box Rental	144.00	
Insurance (Business)	229.00	
Lee District Assoc Dues	20.00	
Community Development		
Trails For Youth	200.00	
TOTAL EXPENSES		894.09
Ending Balance		\$5,268.95

Dues Paying Members – 129 Households, 62 new households, 67 renewals