

**MEADOWS AT SHAWNEE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.
P.O. BOX 475
MILFORD, DE 19963**

**FIFTEENTH ANNUAL COMMUNITY MEETING
June 14, 2023 – 7:00 PM
Milford Senior Center, 111 Park Avenue, Milford, DE**

Board Member Attendees: Mike Boyle, Robert Sheats, Dan Marabello, Linda Steiner, Tom Chilton, Taylor Shunk, Ellen Miller and Bob Shinholt

Also in attendance: Dave Markowitz, Chairman, Neighborhood Watch Committee

OPENING REMARKS:

Board President, Mike Boyle, opened the meeting promptly at 7:00 P.M. and welcomed all homeowners that were present for attending this year's annual meeting. He announced that a quorum had been achieved with 78 lots represented by homeowners in attendance and by proxy. The 55-lot requirement (30%) was met as stipulated in the By-Laws and the meeting can proceed.

President Boyle first commented that today, June 14th, is a significant date in history. It is the 248th birthday of the U.S. Army established on this date in 1775. It is also Flag Day commemorating the 246th anniversary on this date in 1777 when the Continental Congress approved the design of the "Stars and Stripes" as the first national flag, and last but not least, it is his great-grandson's 5th birthday.

Mike announced that the guest speaker for tonight's meeting will be Cecilia Ashe, the new Chief of Police for the Milford Police Department. He then gave some background information on Chief Ashe. She brings more than 27 years of law enforcement experience to Milford. Chief Ashe began with the Arlington County, Virginia Police Department, and most recently she was an Inspector of Operations with the Wilmington Police Department where she served for 17 years. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice and is currently working on her Master's in Administration of Criminal Justice and Organizational Leadership.

Chief Ashe has been recognized by the National Institute of Justice for her leadership role while a senior member of the Wilmington Police Department. It was here where she led a combined effort of local, state and federal agencies which resulted in a 58% reduction in homicides by the end of 2022 and a nearly 30% reduction in shootings in Wilmington, once designated as the Homicide Capitol of the country.

She is also nationally recognized by several law enforcement organizations and known for her leadership and record of success. Milford is indeed fortunate to have someone with Chief Ashe's background, leadership qualities and experience as our new Police Chief. She has been gracious enough to be here for us to get to know each other and I promised that we would try to keep her time to about 20 minutes so she can get home at a reasonable time this evening.

GUEST SPEAKER:

Chief Ashe took the floor and added a little more background information about herself. She is originally from Long Island, New York and was a first responder in New York City on September 11, 2001. After serving as a police officer in Arlington County, Virginia, she moved to Delaware and spent the past 17 years with the Wilmington Police Department. She worked there as the Inspector of Operations.

The Milford Police Department (MPD) currently has 37 officers on the force that serve Milford's population of about 12,000 people. The department is currently short three (3) officers. The Department's mission is to provide fair, impartial and just police services to the citizens and visitors of the City of Milford. Our police officers will be treated equitably. Chief Ashe then took comments and questions from audience.

One homeowner from East Bullrush Drive spoke about an incident that happened near her home in January 2023 where a few men were running onto a number of properties checking for "Ring" doorbells and security cameras. She caught one video on her "Ring" camera and three (3) other videos on other security cameras. She sent the videos and pictures of the incident to the Milford Police Department but never heard back.

A second homeowner asked if there are police officers posted in the various schools in Milford. Chief Ashe responded that the MPD currently has two police officers assigned to the Milford School District as School Resource Officers. They float around to the six (6) schools in the district: the elementary, middle and high school. These officers work with the district's constable staff and security guards to find a balance and ensure the safety of the students and staff. Resource Officers assist the staff with conducting safety drills and must be nationally certified through the "National Association of School Resource Officers."

A third homeowner from Meadow Lark Drive, whose home backs up to Kirdy Road, complained about the loud motorcycles that often speed up and down the street behind her home and if something could be done about this.

One homeowner asked about statistics on addiction, mental illness, police engagement and training on mental health. Chief Ashe said one of her strong focuses in the Department will be on officer health and wellness.

Another homeowner asked if the Department could have more policemen on foot in certain areas of the city as a strategy to address crime and drug issues. Chief Ashe stated that police vehicles have GPS in them and officers patrol around the entire city. The Department has 3 bicycles and the police use them to create a more visible presence. The Chief also said that "No call is a bad call." If something doesn't look right, citizens should call the police department.

A homeowner from East Bullrush Drive commented about judges that let criminals go, the criminal justice system and the subject of cash bail. Chief Ashe replied that in the MPD, the Police are held accountable to hold the system all the way through and there is cash bail.

Another homeowner asked what the laws are regarding people on the street who ask for money. Chief Ashe replied that there is a city code regarding peddling and soliciting and those that violate the law could incur a fine up to \$500.

Chief Ashe's presentation ended at 7:50 PM and with that, President Boyle called the 2023 Meadows at Shawnee Homeowners Association's Annual Meeting to order.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

- President Boyle began his report by commenting that Milford is progressive in policing and we will see changes. New police vehicles have recently been purchased for the force and the construction of the new police building is on target and on budget.

- During this Fiscal Year 2023, the Board of Directors has dealt with many matters affecting the normal operation of the association and stressing our operating budget. Like each of us, the HOA has also had to manage its affairs dealing with increasing costs in all aspects of daily activities. We have seen cost increases in areas like printing and mailing of newsletters, correspondence, insurance coverage, routine grounds maintenance, and landscaping initiatives that caused a scaling back of initial plans. And, after 8 years of use, the HOA needed to replace its computer and printer.

- The Meadows at Shawnee Homeowners Association's financial posture is sound and will end Fiscal Year 2023 on June 30, 2023 on budget. However, we predict increased operating expenses for Fiscal Year 2024 beginning on July 1, 2023 that will necessitate an increase in our annual assessment of \$20.00 for a total annual cost of \$160.00 for FY-2024. Our HOA Treasurer, Dan Marabello, will provide a detailed explanation of our budget and the need for an increase in the annual assessment.

- After 20+ years, our two retention ponds are in need of some significant but normal periodic maintenance. These will be expensive but necessary projects. These are not extraordinary preventive actions but normal periodically necessary preventative maintenance / repair projects needed to ensure the continued proper functioning of the ponds. The HOA, through our Grounds Committee Chairperson, has annually invited Sussex County's Storm Water Management Office to inspect our retention ponds. We have always followed their recommendations to guide our pond maintenance plan. Dan Marabello, Taylor Shunk and I will go further into detail, and entertain questions related to the pond maintenance following the Treasurer's report.

- Taylor Shunk, the HOA Grounds Committee Chairperson will address improvements to our front entrance, common ground maintenance, and a planned change to the HOA Newsletter publications in her report.

- We will also hear from: Tom Chilton, Chairperson of the Architectural Committee and Dave Markowitz, the Neighborhood Watch Committee Chairperson.

- We will vote to elect the HOA Board of Directors. If any homeowner wishes to place his or her name forward for consideration for election to the Board, they will be given the opportunity to address the membership and have their name added to the list of candidates.

- Home sales in the MAS have been reflective of national trends. In calendar year 2022 (January to December 2022), we had 13 homes that sold and selling prices ranged in price from \$280,000 to \$441,000. So far in 2023, we have 3 homes that have sold and selling prices were \$320,000, \$390,000 and \$415,000, for an average selling price of \$375,000.
- On a topic of increasing importance to the HOA is the need of increased participation by homeowners in the management and operation of the association.
- I have routinely expressed a strong desire to see more homeowners volunteer and become involved in the operation of the HOA by considering the following: joining the Neighborhood Watch; participating in our twice annual clean-ups; helping to maintain the front entrance; or, running for election for a seat on the HOA Board of Directors. Our current ability to initiate more activities is restricted by a lack of interest. You don't have to be a Board member to help organize activities for the community, just a desire to make the Meadows at Shawnee a better place to live.
- The reality is that 6 members of our HOA Board of Directors are over the age of 70. Health issues or a sense that it's time to turn over the Board to younger HOA members, could cause some current members to leave the Board in the near future. If that were to occur, the impact on the HOA's functioning could be major. HOA's do not run themselves and don't go away. A successful HOA needs homeowner participation and a commitment to work for the benefit of the community.
- The only other option would be to hire an HOA Property Management Company to take over the management and operational functions of our HOA. However, engaging a management company will initially incur an additional cost between \$10 to \$20 per month/per lot/per house (\$120 to \$240 per year). Additional actions like filing liens, conducting mailings, etc. would incur additional costs per occurrence.
- If you are considering becoming a member of the Board of Directors someday in the future, the Board offers you an opportunity to "shadow" the Board by attending regular meetings to gain an understanding of how an HOA operates. You would also learn about our HOA's governing documents and the State of Delaware statutes (Title 25, Chapter 81) that provide guidance and set the rules for governing common interest communities like HOAs.
- Like the Board of Directors, there is also a critical need for new members to join the Neighborhood Watch Committee as its resident volunteers has been dwindling. Like the Board of Directors, its current members are mostly older residents. The committee members periodically patrol the community on a scheduled basis looking for unusual activities and, if needed, report them to the police. Residents interested in joining the Neighborhood Watch will receive training from the Milford Police Department. Members do not get into confrontational engagements but serve only as "eyes" for the police especially after dark.
- The bottom line is simply that if residents do not step up to get involved in HOA activities, there will come a time when the Meadows at Shawnee will begin to slide from *the best* residential community in Milford to one that has seen better days. Ride around Milford and take a hard look

at both existing and new communities and compare their appearance to ours to better understand the benefit of a fully functioning and active HOA, versus one with little to no active HOA.

- As homeowners, it's a matter of working to ensure your house is an investment with rising market value and positive returns, or a losing investment with stagnant or declining house values.

Mike again thanked all those present for attending the annual meeting. He also gave thanks to the members of the current Board of Directors and the Committee Chairpersons for their contribution to the community - Bob Sheats, Dan Marabello, Linda Steiner, Tom Chilton, Taylor Shunk, Dave Markowitz, Ellen Miller and Bob Shinholt.

The next order of business is the election of the Board of Directors for Fiscal Year 2024.

Nominations from the Floor and Election of Board of Directors

President Boyle referred all members to the packet given to them at the door which includes a ballot sheet with the names of eight (8) homeowners running for a seat on the Board. He asked twice if anyone in the audience would like to add their name to the Ballot as a nominee but there were no nominations from the floor. At this point, homeowner Dave Markowitz made a motion that the eight (8) people on the ballot be elected to the Board of Directors and it was seconded by homeowner, Lloyd Schauer. There was a majority of hands in favor of the motion and none were opposed.

The following homeowners were elected to the Board of Directors for Fiscal Year 2024:

Michael Boyle, Thomas Chilton, Dan Marabello, Ellen Miller, Bob Sheats, Bob Shinholt, Taylor Shunk and Linda Steiner.

President Boyle then turned over the podium to Treasurer, Dan Marabello, to give his financial report.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Dan Marabello referred all members to the financial report included in the annual meeting packet. The total in the checking account as of today is \$3,768.00 and total in the CDs is approximately \$107,000.00. All funds are secured by a Dishonesty Bond for \$100,000.00. As performed in prior years, an internal review of financial reports for the year ending June 30, 2023 will be completed by former Board Member, David Markowitz. Total accounts receivable due from one homeowner is \$375.00.

Dan then reported on the actual income and expenses for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2023 as follows:

FY2023 ACTUAL INCOME

The total assessment fee income collected this fiscal year was \$25,480.00 which represents

\$140.00 collected from 182 lots. There is one (1) lot owner that is delinquent in the payment of their annual dues and the accounts receivable is \$375.00. The interest earned from money in reserves in the CD's is \$2,049.00 and delinquency fees in the sum of \$212.00 were collected this past year. **Total income: \$27,741.00.**

FY2023 ACTUAL EXPENSES

Grounds maintenance - \$9,066; Front entrance landscaping - \$1,200; common area tree removal - \$2,000; Maintenance and/or repairs on the ponds - \$3,795; Insurance - \$3,214; Office (new computer) and postage - \$2,473; annual meeting expense - \$625; Miscellaneous general administration \$687; Newsletter \$446; Professional fees (lawyer) \$420; Taxes \$525; Reserve for pond maintenance expenses - annual allocation of \$6,650 plus earned interest income of \$2,049 = \$8,699. (The goal is to have \$120,000 in reserves by the year 2025 and the HOA is meeting this goal). **Total Expenses: \$33,150.00.** The amount of income under expenses is <\$5,409.00>.

Dan continued his report by detailing the proposed Budget for the next fiscal year. Because of increasing expenses for the maintenance of the common grounds, retention ponds maintenance and repairs, and insurance premiums, the Board of Directors is recommending an increase of \$20.00 over our annual assessment of \$140.00 to **\$160.00.**

Dan then reported on the proposed budget for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2024 as follows:

FY2024 PROPOSED INCOME

Homeowner assessment fees for FY2024 - 183 lots x \$160 per year = \$29,280.00; assessment fees owed from prior years - \$270.00; retention pond interest income - \$3,230.00; delinquency fees - \$360.00. **Total income \$33,140.00.**

FY2024 PROPOSED EXPENSES

Grounds maintenance - \$8,800; front entrance landscaping - \$5,000; common area tree removal - \$1,600; Retention ponds maintenance and/or repairs - \$13,300; Insurance - \$3,550; Office and postage - \$1,100; Annual meeting expense - \$600; Miscellaneous general administration - \$750; Newsletter - \$230; Neighborhood watch expense - \$300; Professional fees - \$500; Contingency - \$1,000; Taxes - \$960; Reserve for future ponds maintenance - \$9,880. **Total expenses \$47,570.00.** The amount of income under expenses is <\$14,430.00>. The short fall will be coming out of the CDs.

A member of the audience questioned the sum of \$13,300 being budgeted for the pond's maintenance. Dan explained that both ponds were inspected in April 2023 by the Sussex Conservation District (SCD) and it was found that repairs should be made. The rip rap and stones in the entry to the small pond from Little Pond Drive had to be replaced right away due to erosion and sediment forming on top of the rocks. An estimate was obtained of \$14,000.00. The SCD gave a grant of \$5,000 for the job and the remainder of \$9,000 had to be paid by the HOA. The rest of the money budgeted of \$4,000 is the amount the HOA pays for the contractor Tributaries,

LLC to service and inspect the ponds on a monthly basis. There are repairs to be done in the Big Pond also but that can wait until next year.

A homeowner from Misty Vale Court asked about the \$107,000.00 that is in the CD's. Dan reported that the HOA has been depositing \$6,650.00 into a new CD every year for the past 14 years specifically for ponds maintenance and repairs. Over the 14 years, \$13,868.55 has been earned in interest. The \$5,000 budgeted for the front entrance landscaping will pay for landscape fabric, metal edging and river rocks to be laid in both beds and the middle island.

At this time, all homeowners in the audience were asked to fill out the green ballot forms in their packets and cast their votes for the approval of the proposed budget of **\$47,570.00** for Fiscal Year 2024 and the annual assessment of **\$160.00** per lot. Homeowner/member Archie Campbell made a motion to accept the proposed budget and annual assessment of \$160.00 per lot and it was seconded by homeowner/member Kathleen Kada. All members present were in favor and none were opposed.

Letters will be sent to all 183 lot owners in the Meadows at Shawnee by the end of June notifying them that the annual assessment of **\$160.00** will be due by **July 31, 2023**.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Architectural Committee

Tom Chilton of the Architectural Committee reported that he has been serving as the Chairperson for the past four years during which time approximately 62 architectural requests have been reviewed and approved. He has had the pleasure of working with the following five (5) members of the committee, who along with himself are responsible for the review of all architectural requests: Mike Boyle, Kent Del Rossi, Robert Sheats, Robert Rodenberg and Robert Shinholt. He thanked them all and recognized them for their work.

Tom explained what the Architectural Committee does. The committee provides advice to the Board of Directors concerning the compatibility and compliance of any Architectural Request form submitted by a homeowner to make modification, on any lot, subject to the Declaration of Restrictive Covenants. The committee is charged to base all of its recommendations upon a just and equitable application of the HOA's restrictions.

The preparation of an Architectural Request is quite simple. Applicants should get all their information together such as the name of project, architectural drawings, if necessary, colors, pictures, and a plot plan showing the location of the project. Review the By-Laws and Restrictions to make sure the project meets those restrictions. Submit the application by either completing it on line and e-mailing it directly to Tom or by printing out the application, clearly filling it out by hand and dropping it off at his house at 38 Meadow Lark Drive. It can also be mailed to the HOA but that will slow down the process. If applications are properly completed with no additional information needed, the turnaround time for approval or disapproval should only take 2 to 3 days. Architectural approvals should be saved by homeowners and kept with their important house papers.

The MAS website includes not only the HOA Architectural Request Form but also the City of Milford Codes and Permit Application form. Completing this on line will make the process much smoother and save a lot of time. Please remember that in most instances where a City of Milford permit is required, the city will require an approval letter from the HOA.

Tom thanked homeowners for their cooperation and looks forward to working with everyone in the community in the coming year providing he is elected to the Board for another year.

Grounds Committee

Chairwoman Taylor Shunk reported that she started the overhaul of the front entrance last spring and summer with the purchase of new perennial plants and mulch applied in all three (3) beds. This summer, she will be ordering new stone curbing to be installed around the two beds. In the next fiscal year, new landscape fabric, metal edging and river rocks will be added to all three beds. The estimate for this work will be approximately \$5,000.00. For now, weeding has to be done periodically and volunteers are needed for that job.

A yearly inspection was conducted by the Sussex Conservation District in April 2023 and it uncovered maintenance issues in the big and little ponds as Mike stated in his report. The rip rap and rocks used to trap sediment so water can flow through and protect erosion need to be replaced. The first area to be repaired will be the spillway on Little Pond Drive that empties into the little pond. Areas that need repair in the big pond can be delayed until next year. A total overhaul of the ponds could cost the HOA more than \$100,000.00. Dan the Treasurer has been putting money in reserves every year in the event this would happen.

A good amount of money is spent on the ponds on a regular basis. Coastal Tributaries, LLC is the company hired by the HOA that handles the yearly maintenance of the Little and Big Ponds. They come in once a month to perform regular maintenance service like inspecting the ponds, removing debris, mowing and applying herbicides when needed.

The HOA will be holding Ice Cream Truck Nights again this summer. The truck will be coming into the development the first Thursday of each month from June to October. Please bring your chairs and meet your neighbors. Taylor will also think about planning for a fire pit and movie night in the Fall.

There will be one more hard copy Newsletter published in the Fall of 2023. After that, plans will be made to post digital Newsletters on the HOA website in the future. Any residents who would like to add topics or pictures to the publication can email Taylor at any time at: taylorshunk@gmail.com.

Neighborhood Watch Committee

Chairman Dave Markowitz reminded all homeowners that they should know the Milford Police Department's general phone number which is 302-422-8081 and have it available at all times. He stated that everyone in the development is a member of the Neighborhood Watch and that if you see something suspicious, you should call the police department right away. They do respond when called.

Dave reported that there is always a need for more people to join the Neighborhood Watch. Interested residents who feel they can volunteer one day or night out of every four weeks should add their name on the Neighborhood Watch sign-up sheet in the lobby. They can also call Dave at 302-422-8003 for more information.

The Neighborhood Watch was formed about 13 years ago by a group of MAS homeowners and the original organizers were trained by the Milford Police Department. Original members that are still on the committee train the new volunteers that join.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Q & A and Comments from Homeowners in the Audience:

One homeowner from East Bullrush Drive commented about people with cameras walking in the development taking pictures. Dave replied that it could have been property assessors and they should have identification on them.

Another homeowner from West Bullrush Drive commented that cars often drive into the cul de sac and have to turn around because there is no outlet. They asked if a “No Outlet” sign could be posted in that area.

School is out for the summer and all residents are reminded that the speed limit in the Meadows at Shawnee is 25 MPH.

Letters will be mailed out by June 30, 2023 to all homeowners informing them that the annual assessment of **\$160.00** will be due by **July 31, 2023**.

A second homeowner from East Bullrush Drive asked if letters could be mailed to those owners in the development whose homes are covered with green algae and mold. The Meadows at Shawnee does not have a maintenance clause in their Declaration of Restrictions but a letter could be sent suggesting power washing of the home.

A homeowner from Big Pond Drive also commented about cars speeding on Kirby Road.

A second homeowner on West Bullrush Drive complained about residents blowing their horns during the day when picking up people on the block. It is very disturbing.

A homeowner from East Bullrush Drive signed one of the volunteer sign-up sheets offering to serve as an IT Backup/Webmaster.

After the “Question and Answer” session was finished, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

A transition meeting with newly elected Board Members immediately followed.

Respectfully submitted by:
Linda Steiner, Board Secretary