

# The Whispers

Bi-Monthly Newsletter of the Whispering Oaks Homeowners Association Published by Neighborhood News, Inc.

## EARLY RESULTS: PROPOSED COVENANT AMENDMENTS ARE POPULAR

The WOHA Board has begun distributing a community-wide ballot containing 7 proposed amendments to the Restrictive Covenants which were attached to every property deed by the subdivision's developer nearly 60 years ago. The Whispers outlined the initiative several times over the past year and community meetings were held on select topics. Ballots are being mailed in batches, and every property owner will receive one before the year's end.

Early results indicate the vast majority of homeowners want the extra protections which mimic those commonly found in nearby subdivisions. But the proposed amendments will only be ratified if enough ballots are returned to meet the required threshold.

Any property owner can initiate amendments to the Covenants, and WOHA members overwhelmingly authorized their board to undertake the process in September 2023. With guidance from specialized legal experts, the group is seeking updates to the neighborly rules to guard against modern threats to property values and our collective quality of life. An overview of the process and sample ballot are posted on [whisperingoaks.org](http://whisperingoaks.org)

Among the proposals is establishment of a Common Area Fund to pay for maintenance of the landscaped community entrances and perimeter. WOHA memberships, which are held by over half of all households, have paid the bills for nearly 50 years, but inflation has caused the group to appeal for broader, consistent support. The proposed amendment would assess a \$25 annual fee from every property. The funds would be strictly limited for the stated use and overseen by WOHA who hires the various contractors and pays the related utilities and insurances.

“We know that the vast majority of residents want welcoming, attractive entrances for themselves and their guests, so we’re optimistic most will be willing to chip in \$2 a month to help underwrite our caretaking” says Peter Lund, WOHA President. “It’s a nominal amount, but candidly we’re approaching the point where WOHA must either raise its membership fee significantly or get a little support from every household for this common good which increasingly dominates our budget.”

Other amendments seek to reduce reliance upon city staff to mitigate nuisance concerns, such as yard upkeep and junk vehicles. Calls to 311 for these issues are assigned to the city’s notoriously



Rising inflation is affecting WOHA's caretaking of our entrances.

*(Continued on page 3)*



## Celebrate the Season with WOHA's Holiday Home Decorating Contest!



Judges will tour the neighborhood the evening of Sunday December 18 to identify the most festive exteriors. Prizes will be awarded and winners featured on [whisperingoaks.org](http://whisperingoaks.org)



# Peter's Prez-spective

A Letter from the WOHA President

## COULD 7 BE YOUR LUCKY NUMBER? WOHA HOPES YOU NEVER NEED IT THIS AMENDMENT.

Disagreements among neighbors are unpleasant. But for 50 years now, WOHA volunteers have occasionally been willing to be the bad guy for a good reason. The Board is routinely asked to tamp down a code or covenant violation that city staff or nearby neighbors have been unable to resolve. We'll sometimes, but not always, agree to approach the resident causing the concern. And covenant ballot Amendment 7 seeks to improve this fallback option.

Consider this example. Let's say that the widely popular amendment to phase out Short Term Rentals is ratified by all Units across Whispering Oaks, but then an out-of-state investor buys the home directly behind yours and starts advertising on AirBnb. If his property sits in a different Unit, the current Covenants don't provide you any legal recourse. That's because you can only demand compliance among properties within your own Unit.

The city wouldn't be much help. It might revoke his permit if the rental is proven to be a repeated menace encroaching upon the neighborhood, but that process could take years. Just ask the homeowners near Whisper Circle or Whisper View if relying upon city staff to crack down on intrusive STR's proved to be a swift solution for their headaches.

You would be stuck hoping that a homeowner in the adjoining Unit will eventually hire an attorney to demand the AirBnb be shuttered. And that's not likely because residents are reluctant to tangle with their neighbors or pay to do it. Additionally, there may be surprisingly few homeowners even eligible to take that step because some of our Units are as small as just two or three properties.

That's why WOHA proposed Amendment 7. It would allow the organization to offer support communitywide regardless of Unit boundaries. Is it possible that a future Board President would go bananas and misuse the expanded power? Well, consider that nearby homeowners have always had the right to pursue you for a Covenant violation and convince WOHA to help settle the dispute. But that has happened rarely in 50 years. We live here too and we like getting along with the neighbors we see every day.

WOHA exists to enhance and protect the common good. It spends most of its resources caretaking the entrances and lobbying city officials for publicly funded improvements like new sidewalks. Occasionally we will issue polite letters requesting (not demanding) that a homeowner do the right thing.

But without Amendment 7, no homeowner would have the ability to mitigate lingering problems in nearby Units or across the community. It would be wise to centralize that capability with WOHA which any resident can join and lead if desired. Its involvement isn't guaranteed by any means, but anyone could petition the Board that a serious threat or troubling precedent shouldn't be ignored. Any action on our part would need to be voted upon, and we're currently drafting changes to our organizational rules to ensure community input is obtained.

Covenants that protect all of us in a modern world will reduce the likelihood of conflicts in the first place. It's about time Whispering Oaks enjoyed some of the safeguards nearby communities secured long ago. However we may not be able to ratify any of the amendments unless the legally required threshold in your Unit is secured, so be sure to return your ballot before it's too late. Otherwise you may wait 50 another years for your next opportunity.

*The Whispers*



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(“Covenant Amendment Ballots...” from page 1)

understaffed Code Enforcement team. Frustrated residents advise that egregious cases, often at rental properties owned by out-of-state investors, can become prominent eyesores that linger for months. The amendments will empower residents to bypass city staff and request help from WOHA volunteers when all else fails.

“The existing Covenants have rarely been formally enforced over the years” says Lund. “But in those odd instances when an encroaching problem needs to be resolved, it’s good to know you’ve got some control to protect your investment and family’s enjoyment.”

Lund suspects most residents may not fully appreciate how the covenants have spared Whispering Oaks the decline evident in nearby neighborhoods built around the same time. “Just drive through some of the subdivisions directly west along Wurzbach and you’ll see once desirable neighborhoods falling on increasingly hard times. They were once on par with Whispering Oaks, but their developers didn’t have the foresight to establish basic community standards” says Lund.

“And unfortunately, once decline grips a neighborhood it can be very difficult to reverse. The proposed amendments will address some lingering vulnerabilities, and frankly are long overdue.”

## AVOID UNWANTED GUESTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS



Autumn is the time for homeowners to deter four-legged visitors looking for a warm winter’s den. According to the local Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation group, many species of animals are currently searching for winter homes and potential places to nest their young next spring.

After ensuring that chimneys, roofs, eaves and attics are sealed to prevent unwelcome entry, also check under decks and sheds to close off any areas a small animal could climb inside. Never leave pet food or water dishes outside at night which can attract unwanted wildlife.

It’s much easier to prevent urban wildlife from taking up residence than to remove it. Getting rid of raccoons, skunks, opossums and squirrels is a difficult task and can be expensive if a professional is required.

## MASSIVE FIRE GUTS EASTSIDE RESIDENCE

A fire completely destroyed the home at 2803 Whisper Path on September 12 and the remaining structure was leveled the following week. Long term community residents believe this was only the second dwelling to be demolished due to fire in the subdivision’s nearly 60 year history.

The home had been listed for sale nearly 3 months preceding the fire and reportedly vacant at the time, so no occupants were injured. However SAFD confirms one of its firefighters sustained minor injuries battling the blaze. An investigation to the fire’s cause remained open at this publication’s deadline.



## Yard of the Month

October



Robert & Joan Turner  
11507 Whisper Moss

## CLEVER CURB APPEAL

Several residences have installed panel screens to hide waste and recycling bins from street view. The screens are typically mounted alongside driveways and particularly smart when bin placement behind a fence gate isn't feasible. Clever variations are popping up all around the neighborhood. Downsizing bins from the default 96 to 48 gallon size allows for smaller screens and also save on city collection fees.



## WHISPERING OAKS SALES



August '24 - October '24

Prepared by Jean Ruffini, Resident Realtor

	<u>Price</u>	<u>Per sq. ft.</u>
<b>Sold: 1</b>	\$297,900	\$160
<b>Active Asking: 4</b>		
High.....	\$699,000.....	\$269
Low.....	\$419,000.....	\$153
<b>Pending: 2</b>		
High.....	\$315,000.....	\$181
Low.....	\$301,600.....	\$125

## CITY POLICY FOR CANS AT THE CURB

When can waste and recycling bins be placed curbside? City ordinances state they should be placed no earlier than 6 p.m. the night before of the regularly scheduled pickup day, and not later than 7 a.m. the day of collection. They should then be removed by 10 p.m. following pickup or could incur a citation for creating a nuisance. For assistance, dial 311.

# Go Green

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## A HEARTFELT THANKS TO DR. RICHARD PRESSMAN



Dr. Richard Pressman, Former Editor of The Whispers

Longtime editor of The Whispers, Dr. Richard Pressman, has officially retired from the WOHA Board after 8 years editing this newsletter. He accepted the role in 2016 adding his own spark and love of language to the publication.

A professor of English at St. Mary's University for 37 years, Richard and his wife Judine Taylor who continues to be a WOHA Welcome

Wagon volunteer, have lived in our neighborhood for 29 years and raised two children here. Their son Samuel lives in New York and daughter Graciela also lives in Whispering Oaks where she is raising their grandchild.

During his tenure as editor, this newsletter frequently grew to 12 or more pages of engaging content. Richard advocated for consistent use of full color printing which greatly improved its attractiveness and enhanced the images he snapped of community activities.

His dedication to our wonderful neighborhood continues to be admired and appreciated by his fellow board members. Richard's talents and humorous anecdotes will be missed as the newsletter ambles along without his guiding hand.

Thank you Richard!

Thanks to all who participated in the 2024 Halloween Decorating Contest! See [whisperingoaks.org](http://whisperingoaks.org) for winners list.



## PREVENT ACCIDENTAL FALLS AT HOME

Falls are the leading cause of injury in the United States, affecting people of all ages. Older adults are particularly vulnerable to fall-related injuries, significantly impacting their ability to live independently.

Debbie Jennings, a nurse and health advocate with San Antonio based Doin' Well LLC, recommends these practical tips to reduce the risk of falls:

- Poor lighting leads to problems. Make sure your home is well lit, especially on staircases.
- Install railings on both sides of all stairs. Use reflective tape to mark the top and edge of each step.
- Install grab bars in and around your tub / shower and next to the toilet. Use non-slip mats, strips, or carpet in wet areas. Consider replacing your shower head with a hand held nozzle.
- Keep frequently used kitchen items in easy to reach cabinets or shelves. Clean up floor spills immediately.
- Keep walkways clear of clutter, such as cords, papers, shoes, books, and other hazards.
- Some medications cause dizziness or drowsiness. Be sure to review your medications with your pharmacist or provider at least once a year.
- Strengthen your muscles and improve balance with regular activities like walking, yoga, or tai chi.

Doin' Well supports seniors striving to stay in their homes and conducts in-home risk assessments and trainings. Jennings says her staff often starts by helping clients reduce clutter. Services can be requested via [doinwell.org](http://doinwell.org)

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*Whispering Oaks Resident*

## NEARBY CENTER OFFERS SOMETHING FOR EVERY SENIOR

The expansive Walker Ranch Senior Center has quickly become a popular destination for Whispering Oaks residents. The beautiful facility which opened in August 2022 is conveniently located just down the road at 835 West Rhapsody near West Ave and Wurzbach Parkway.

A myriad of activities and services are available free of charge to Bexar County residents 60 and older. No appointment is required to take a tour and friendly staff is happy to align newcomers with appropriate services. The impressive facility is sunny, clean, and welcoming. It's the perfect place for seniors to stay physically and mentally active while making new friends. The fitness area is particularly popular. It features state-of-the-art exercise machines, pool and ping pong tables, indoor chair volleyball, and outdoor pickleball courts are currently under construction. The facility offers 36 exercise classes weekly including yoga, aerobics, line dancing, zumba, cardio training, pilates, tai chi, and even belly dancing among others. Guests are limited to one class per day.

Patrons gather for scheduled card and board games including bridge, bingo, mahjong, dominos, trivia and Rummikub. The facility also features several meeting rooms where classes and creative activities are held. Seniors can learn knitting, create various forms of art projects, join a book or poetry club, learn to play a musical instrument, and garner new computer skills from helpful volunteers.

Entertainment can be enjoyed as well. The brave can drop in for karaoke sing-alongs, movies are shown regularly, and frequent field trips escort patrons to local sights and museums often providing lectures from area experts.

Informative classes and gatherings appear also on the robust monthly calendar. These include support groups for senior-related topics, such as caregiving and nutrition. Nursing staff regularly offer health screenings and immunizations on-site.

The Center is open weekdays (Monday - Thursday 7am to 8pm, and Friday 7am to 4pm) but closed on weekends. Complimentary lunch is available on a first come basis weekdays starting at 11am. A shuttle is available to transport patrons to and from the facility. For more information, enter "Walker Ranch" in the search bar of the sa.gov website or call 210-207-5280.



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## UPROAR OVER TENNIS PARK PARKING

SAPD has warned the Tennis Park at Whispering Oaks on the west side of our subdivision that its patrons may incur citations for failing to park parallel to the curb along Whisper Forest. Patrons had parked perpendicular in front of the complex for decades, which was built in the early 1970's and therefore not required to provide off-street parking. The widely accepted arrangement was popular with the community because it reduced parking on adjacent streets and shielded disembarking children from passing traffic.

Whisper Forest is a short half-block roadway with only one residence. Perpendicular parking accommodated up to 25 vehicles versus just 9 for parallel. City traffic engineers confirm the street is currently too narrow to be formally re-classified for perpendicular parking and widening would be both costly and require removal of protected oaks. The same is true for Whisper Willow which also adjoins the complex.

A gentleman who lives a block away from the courts had contacted WOHA last fall concerned that the longstanding arrangement might be negatively impacting neighbors closest to the complex. WOHA's subsequent investigation failed to find any nearby residents who shared his concerns, and some even expressed appreciation for recent street improvements initiated by the club. However the gentleman persisted.

Karen Mannheimer who operates the tennis complex in partnership with the Whispering Oaks Swim Club says that he repeatedly expressed intention to escalate the issue with city officials. "I understand the ordinance," says Mannheimer, "but there were a lot of benefits to the way things had been for so long. I strive to minimize impact on our neighbors and what he insisted upon would be disruptive."

Shortly after Mannheimer and her business partner Scott Wilbur notified patrons that vehicles must now park parallel, dismayed homeowners on adjacent streets noticed an influx of cars. Some are baffled why someone who lives a block away and not directly affected by the issue would become so adamant. "Why fix what wasn't broken?" said one homeowner now upset that vehicles routinely obstruct his mailbox. The gentleman who raised the issue to WOHA last fall did not respond to its request for comment for this article.

SAPD says homeowners routinely get frustrated when strangers park on the public street in front of their homes, but it's perfectly legal provided driveway access is not impeded and a sufficient setback from street corners is maintained. Even parking in front of curbside mailboxes

is not prohibited, even though it can often interrupt USPS delivery since postal regulations allow carriers to pass by an inaccessible box. Some elderly homeowners along Whisper Green have begun to receive notices to retrieve their mail from a local USPS facility instead.

"The law is the law, but I just don't see an upside from having stirred this pot" says Mannheimer who intends to hold a neighborhood meeting to discuss the issue. "Our patrons, particularly the children, are now less safe and nearby homeowners are more inconvenienced. I am just as upset as they are. And there's no easy solution in sight."



Aerial view shows vehicles parked perpendicular on Whisper Forest.

## LOW BRANCHES LEAD TO DAMAGE



This broken tree branch demonstrates why there's a City ordinance requiring 14.5 feet of clearance above streets even at curbside. Look up to avoid placing waste bins beneath low hanging branches. A serious wound to your tree can invite deadly and costly diseases such as oak wilt.

## LOOKING TO START A GROUP OR CLUB?

Looking to start a walking group, bike riding group, book club? Let us know so we can get the word out for you. This would be a great way to get to know your neighbors.



**Send an email to:**

**[editorial@neighborhoodnews.com](mailto:editorial@neighborhoodnews.com)**



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*"Gardening adds years to your life and life to your years."*  
- Anonymous

# Whispering Oaks Garden Club



The garden club is back in full swing with an eye on our purpose as stated in the by-laws. "The purpose of this organization is to encourage sociability among its members and to promote knowledge and interest in gardening along with community beautification and service projects." The sociability happens easily, often fueled by all the delightful and delicious snacks members bring to the table at our in-home meetings.

The knowledge sometimes comes from members sharing success or failure with landscapes and home gardens. Recently professional advice came our way in the person of Jacob West of Bartlett Tree Experts. His talk and power-point presentation explained the effects on our trees and shrubs due to weather extremes. Alternating rain and drought, and especially Uri, the snow and ice storm in February 2021 added to the landscape stress.

Mr. West also addressed the oak wilt danger on the east side of our subdivision. He recommended that each homeowner in the oak wilt path of destruction start a financial "war chest" to save as many oaks as possible. It's a matter of saving property value. Plans are now in discussion among members to contribute to community beautification. This contribution will be in honor of two deceased garden club members who gave much to the club and Whispering Oaks in general over the years.

In early 2025, our annual service project to benefit the Sarah Roberts French Home will take place. This home for the needy and disabled offers a safe environment to about sixty women. We will make Valentine gift bags for them. You are welcome to help. It's always rewarding to all involved. It's never too late to join up. Contact us by email at [whisperingoaksgardenclub@gmail.com](mailto:whisperingoaksgardenclub@gmail.com).



*Submitted by Ann Parsons with thanks to Richard Pressman who edited The Whispers for many years.*