

# Arbor Hills Newsletter

## January 2020

### Calendar of Events

February 20, 2020	Board Meeting – 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
February 25, 2020	Board Meeting – 7:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.
March 2020	Open Board Meeting – 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Exact date/location TBD. <b>Reminders for open Board meetings are posted on the yellow, plastic sign set up near the entrance to Arbor Hills. Please watch for them!</b>

### Addressing Concerns about the Appointment/Continuance of Board Members for 2020

Regrettably, despite our best efforts to communicate and encourage everyone to attend our annual neighborhood association meeting at Clague Middle School on 10/24/2019, we did not have enough people present and/or proxies on hand to achieve a quorum. This was quite a disappointment; however, those in attendance unanimously endorsed (by show of hands) the only two (2) candidates listed on the ballot for the Board – Dennis Stom and Thomas Edwards. Residents had the opportunity, well in advance of the meeting, to nominate themselves or others to serve on the Board. Nominations from the floor were also encouraged on 10/24/2019. **Dennis and Thomas were the only people nominated.**

In situations like this, it is common and acceptable for existing Board members to continue to serve on the Board until the next scheduled annual meeting. In addition, if someone resigns from the Board, Board members may appoint someone to fill the vacancy. Therefore, it was determined that Dennis Stom and Thomas Edwards would continue to serve on the Board. Steve Hadrill and Sherri Fountain would also remain on the Board to serve out their 2-year terms of office. A few weeks after the meeting, Ig Justyna was appointed to serve on the Board to fill the vacancy left by David Wang who resigned from the Board on 11/11/2019. All five (5) Board positions will be open for election at the October 2020 annual meeting.

Two (2) Arbor Hills residents recently contacted the Board to express concern about the outcome of the 10/24/2019 annual meeting and the manner in which Board members have been appointed to serve our community. In response to these concerns, the Board offers the following:

- In the absence of quorum, members of the Board may remain in place until the next election. Dennis Stom and Thomas Edwards did not self-appoint. They were not voted off the Board. The Board invited and appointed Ig Justyna to serve as a Board member to fill the vacancy resulting from David Wang's resignation. The Board believes these actions are in concert with AHCA bylaws and precedent. (See Section 12.6 of the AHCA bylaws.)
- If a resident is unhappy with these actions, he/she may take steps to force the removal of one or more Directors and to subsequently hold a special meeting to elect new officers in accordance with the bylaws for AHCA. (See Section 12.7 of the AHCA bylaws.)
- If there is sufficient interest in taking such action, a special election could be held earlier than October 2020.
- At this time, the Board has decided Arbor Hills homeowners' association money will not be used to fight a special election.

Our Board members volunteer many hours in service to Arbor Hills. We work hard to maintain our neighborhood and help keep residents safe and happy! Although it's not easy to please everyone, we make every effort to meet residents' needs in a spirit of cooperation and good will. We urge you to carefully consider whether it is in the best interest of our community to remove Board members at this time. We are doing our level best to openly communicate with you and to responsibly manage maintenance and financial affairs on your behalf. Hopefully, we have your support for the actions we have taken to fill Board of Director positions. We have a great team and would like to have the opportunity to finish projects in progress. We look forward to continuing to serve you and your families!

## **The Truth about Dues**

**At this time, no determination has been made about whether we will need to increase homeowners' association dues.** Traditionally, every five (5) years, AHCA retains an expert to conduct a "Reserve Study" to help us determine whether we are on track to fund future maintenance and improvement projects for common elements in Arbor Hills. For example, the "Reserve Study" should help us determine whether we will have enough money "in reserve" to fund pavement rehab and/or replacement in the future. The "AHCA Reserve Study" is scheduled for completion this spring and has been expanded to include on-site assessments of common elements in Arbor Hills.

The Board is not relying solely on the results of the "Reserve Study." We are scheduled to meet with a registered professional Civil Engineer in February. He has expertise in Pavement Engineering and will provide technical guidance about various pavement maintenance, repair and replacement options. We have also engaged with City of Arbor officials for clarification and guidance about City ordinances and ADA compliance. Sometime in late spring 2020, the Board will determine whether it is prudent and necessary to change the amount of our dues based on the results of the "Reserve Study" and information obtained from technical professionals.

We are doing our best to accurately budget for annual operating expenses, and predict and cover future expected, **and unexpected**, project costs. It's important to collect and manage our dues each year to avoid the need to charge Arbor Hills residents costly "special assessments" in the future.

We're careful with your money! Board members diligently screen multiple contractors before hiring them to perform paving, grounds maintenance, tree/brush removal, pond maintenance, street lighting and drain repair-related work, etc. Occasionally, dedicated volunteers and other residents with engineering or technical expertise assist with projects in our neighborhood! We are grateful for their efforts. They help us save a lot of money. **If you would like to volunteer, please contact the Board!**

## **Arbor Hills Condominium Association (AHCA) 2020 Budget**

The Board of Directors recently finalized the 2020 Budget for Arbor Hills. We encourage you to take a look at it! Casa Bella has emailed copies of the January 2020 newsletter, along with copies of the budget document, to our residents. Residents who do not have computer access, will receive hard copies of the newsletter and budget in the mail from Casa Bella. In addition, the newsletter and 2020 Budget have also been posted to the Casa Bella website for access by "registered" Arbor Hills residents. **All Arbor Hills residents are encouraged to "register" with Casa Bella so they may access valuable resource information about AHCA. Register today! (See the final article below for instructions.)**

## **Maximizing Earnings on our "Reserves"**

The Board is pleased to report that over the past few months we have taken positive steps to transfer and reinvest the majority of AHCA's "reserve" dollars in safe, interest-bearing certificates of deposit (CDs). This money has been saved up over time for the purpose of funding significant, and expensive, projects such as pavement replacement. Some of our reserve money was previously invested in accounts with low rates of return. Fortunately, we identified institutions that offer CDs with higher interest rates in the range of 2.2% - 2.3%. We are excited about the positive effect this will have on our reserve pool over the long haul!

## **Potholes be Gone!**

Squeak! Squeak! That's the sound you might have heard as we squeaked by Mother Nature last fall to complete pavement repairs in four (4) compromised areas. Two (2) potholes and two (2) areas of crumbling pavement were repaired with large cut and replace, hot mix asphalt repairs. Unfortunately, we were not as lucky with Father Winter. The very week crack filling was scheduled to take place, Ann Arbor was hit by the worst snowstorm we've experienced this winter – 11"- 12" of new snow in one night! Our crack filling contract from September 2019 will be fulfilled in late spring/early summer 2020. In addition, the Board budgeted extra money in the AHCA 2020 Budget to address anticipated asphalt and pavement-related issues.

## **Update on our Neighborhood Inspection**

As mentioned in previous newsletters, Casa Bella and Board members recently completed our neighborhood inspection. We are also taking extra care to evaluate our sidewalks. **If your property is found to be out of compliance with the Arbor Hills bylaws and/or mandated City of Ann Arbor ordinances, you will receive a letter from Casa Bella. This initial letter will request and encourage you to address identified areas of concern by August 31, 2020.**

Trouble spots identified during the recent inspection include: green/black algae (which resembles mold), growing on vinyl siding on the north-facing side of homes; trees that need trimming; vegetation growing out of gutters; doors or trim in need of repair or painting; broken windows; grass and weeds that are too high; old pots, refuse/broken items on porches or in yards; sidewalks and driveways in need of “concrete lifts” or replacement; illegally dumped yard waste or other items in common areas behind homes; failure to store garbage and recycling bins inside garages. Many of these issues can be addressed without having to hire a contractor.

**If you have not resolved identified areas of concern by August 31, 2020, you may receive a second letter from Casa Bella and further action, including fines, may be taken to ensure compliance with our bylaws.** Please take steps now to address trouble spots on your home. Reputable contractors are in demand and super busy! We encourage you to line them up in early 2020.

## **Focus on Sidewalk Safety**

Arbor Hills has private roads and sidewalks; however, we use the City of Ann Arbor ordinance related to sidewalk slab elevation offsets. If you have sidewalk sections in front of your yard and driveway, it is your responsibility to maintain them. Sidewalks must be maintained with no elevation offsets of greater than ½ inch. You should also check for cracking or crumbling that could create trip hazards. Numerous sidewalk problems were identified during our recent neighborhood inspection and will be communicated to affected residents. **Sidewalk repairs and/or replacement must be completed by August 31, 2020.** Our Board is excited to report that we recently connected with a sidewalk leveling company to negotiate a “group discount” for our residents! **If you notice an elevated section of sidewalk in a common area, please contact Casa Bella right away.**

The Board has arranged for a registered professional engineer from the City of Ann Arbor to meet with us to evaluate targeted areas (e.g., sidewalks, entrance ramps, our city parks) within Arbor Hills and to advise us about Americans with Disabilities (ADA) compliance requirements. We will keep you posted on what we learn.

## **Tree Care and Trimming**

Sadly, the flowering pear trees at our front entrance had to be removed due to disease. In order to avoid damaging the shrubs surrounding the trees, the remaining tree stumps were not ground down. The certified arborist engaged to oversee this project recommended that we give the planting beds a little breathing room before planting something new. Therefore, we do not plan to replace the trees in 2020.

Unfortunately, many of our residents also have flowering pear trees that have been affected by “Pear Trellis Rust.” The leaves on affected trees become speckled with bright orange spots, then prematurely turn brown or black and fall off. **If you have a diseased or dead tree on your property or on the street in front of your home, you are responsible for caring for it or, if needed, removing and replacing it.**

## **What’s the Right Height for Trees Hanging over Sidewalks and Streets?**

We don’t want anyone to get hurt while using our sidewalks. Arbor Hills follows the City of Ann Arbor ordinance regarding acceptable street tree height. It is your responsibility to **ensure trees located near your sidewalk are trimmed to allow for at least a 6-foot clearance above the sidewalk.** It also has been brought to our attention that drivers of snow plows, large delivery trucks and garbage trucks are having trouble avoiding tree limbs that are hanging too low over our roadways. Therefore, **we request that you trim your street trees to ensure at least an 8-foot clearance above the street. This will help protect snow plow and other drivers; reduce the chance of damage to your trees; and help ensure Budd’s can safely access all areas of our roads and clear snow to the curb.**

## **For Safety's Sake, Please Clear Snow and Ice!**

Our children, dog walkers, and fellow neighbors appreciate your efforts to maintain and clear your sidewalks and driveway! Homeowners (or renters) are responsible for clearing snow accumulation of one (1) inch or more on sidewalks within 24 hours. In addition, ice must be removed and icy areas must be treated with sand or a salt-free substance designed to melt ice (e.g., "Safe Step" ice melting granules). To protect our sensitive wetland and wildlife areas, it is not permissible to use salt on driveways or sidewalks (per Ann Arbor City Code, Chapter 49). **If you use a snow blower or contract with someone to clear your driveway and sidewalks, please don't blow the snow into unplowed or plowed streets. Cleared snow must go into your yard.**

## **Make Way for Budd's -- our Snow Plowing Company**

Please keep an eye on weather reports for anticipated snowfall that may exceed two (2) inches or more. Budd's Lawn Care & Landscaping generally arrives within two (2) hours of each two (2) inch accumulation of snow. Plowing may be delayed when the weather is really severe, so please be patient. **It's your responsibility to make sure your vehicles are removed from our streets to accommodate Budd's and help ensure all roadways are thoroughly cleared. Failure to comply with this request may result in your (or your guests') vehicles being towed at your expense.** And remember: Homeowners/renters are responsible for clearing their own sidewalks and driveways, not Budd's.

**Budd's also has been retained to salt our street intersections when needed.** (Regular "full-street" salting is not possible because of our sensitive wetlands and conservation easements.) We need your help! Budd's is not always aware of slippery, icy conditions. If you have concerns about street plowing or identify icy conditions in our intersections, please notify Alex at Casa Bella and the Arbor Hills Board. We want to address these concerns as quickly as possible.

If you neglect to clear your sidewalk and driveway in a timely manner, the association may have to hire a contractor to remove snow and/or ice at your property at your expense. You may also be subject to fines. Please help keep our children, other residents and pets safe!

## **Keeping the Peace with Mother Nature**

Living in Arbor Hills allows us to enjoy a lot of natural beauty right at our doorsteps, deck rails and property lines. If tree limbs and/or native vegetation are encroaching on your property (over your property line from a common area), you have permission to trim or remove it at your own expense. The Board is fine with this. Also, we need our residents to remove small tree limbs and branches that may land on their property from common areas. This is not the responsibility of the homeowners' association. If, however, you believe a tree located in a common area threatens to injure someone or damage property, please notify Casa Bella and the Board right away. **Please note: Certified arborists advised us that, due to risk of disease, there are only certain times of the year when it is prudent to cut down or trim trees (e.g., red oaks). We don't want to run the risk of "infecting" and killing healthy trees by cutting down or trimming trees at the wrong time of the year.** The City of Ann Arbor is responsible for caring for trees in our city parks. If you see a diseased or dead tree in our parks, notify Casa Bella.

## **Before You Start Home Repair/Improvement Projects ...**

You must complete and submit a **"Request for Modification" approval form in advance if you wish to make a change** from established color standards (e.g., trim, roof shingles, front doors, siding, etc.); garage door or window pane design (e.g. muntin/grid versus plain glass); or outdoor structural components (retaining walls, decks, fences, etc.). This form is available on the Arbor Hills website and from Casa Bella Property Management.

Continued on Next Page ...

It is also the **responsibility of homeowners to ensure appropriate building permits are obtained** (either by themselves or hired contractors), prior to initiating electrical, mechanical, heating and cooling, plumbing, and/or renovation or construction projects. This also applies to roofing, window replacement, deck replacement/construction, fence construction, basement refinishing, and other home improvement or large landscaping projects. For your own protection, verify contractors are properly licensed and insured to do the work. And, don't forget you are legally required to contact "MISS DIG" to identify/flag underground utilities before you or your contractors begin any excavation project (e.g., planting shrubs and trees)!

### **A Reminder about January Dues and Penalty Fees for Late Payment**

Association fees are due from each Arbor Hills household every six (6) months -- by January 1 and July 1. Payment invoices/coupons (in the amount of \$365) were mailed by Casa Bella for fees due by January 1, 2020. **Fees which were due by January 1, 2020 (in the amount of \$365.00 per household), which have not been paid, are now overdue (in arrears).** Residents who have not paid their homeowners' association fees within a 30-day grace period following the due date, incur an additional \$25 *per month* late/penalty fee until all outstanding fees are paid in full. These late fees can add up quickly! Unfortunately, we have to engage an attorney to handle collections and, in some cases, arrange to garnish wages or place liens on homes in order to collect overdue fees. **Applicable attorney fees are charged back to residents who are in arrears.** We hate this, but have a duty to collect homeowners' association fees to cover budgeted expenses to maintain Arbor Hills on behalf of all our residents! If you have a question about your dues, contact Alex at Casa Bella immediately.

### **Keeping in Touch with You!**

We recognize many Arbor Hills residents have established Facebook and Google Groups accounts for those who wish to informally participate in sharing information about our neighborhood. **Please be advised, however, the official and exclusive source of approved information for Arbor Hills residents is the Arbor Hills website: [www.arbor-hills.org](http://www.arbor-hills.org).** Visit [arbor-hills.org](http://arbor-hills.org) to read newsletters, meeting minutes and various announcements, and to learn about our upcoming events, bylaws, policies and more. Various forms are available on this website. **If you identify a safety issue that affects our residents, please contact the Arbor Hills Board of Directors at: [Board@Arbor-Hills.org](mailto:Board@Arbor-Hills.org). If you observe a fire or suspected criminal activity, immediately call police at 911.**

### **Please Register On-Line with Casa Bella**

**Each of our adult residents needs to establish an Arbor Hills Account through Casa Bella Property Management** to ensure receipt of email communications (newsletters and announcements) about our community. These communications are distributed by Casa Bella on behalf of Arbor Hills. To set up your account, go to: [www.casabellamanagement.com](http://www.casabellamanagement.com); click on CREATE ACCOUNT; complete your information; including the unit number for your property (Lot #); click CONTINUE. Within 1-2 business days, your account will be established with Casa Bella! **You can pay your association fees online once you establish an account with Casa Bella. You may also mail your association fees to Casa Bella at the address listed at the bottom of this newsletter.**

### **Contacts**

#### **Property Management Company:**

Alex Stankiewicz  
Community Association Manager  
CASA BELLA PROPERTY MANAGEMENT, INC.  
850 N. Crooks Road, Ste. 100  
Clawson, MI 48017

EMAIL: [alex@casabellamanagement.com](mailto:alex@casabellamanagement.com)  
TEL: 248.655.1500, ext. 1010  
FAX: 248.655.3900  
WEBSITE: [www.casabellamanagement.com](http://www.casabellamanagement.com)

**Board:** [board@arbor-hills.org](mailto:board@arbor-hills.org)

**Arbor Hills Website:** [www.arbor-hills.org](http://www.arbor-hills.org)

Dennis Stom -- President  
Ig Justyna -- Vice President  
Sherri Fountain -- Secretary  
Steve Hadrill -- Treasurer  
Thomas Edwards -- Director at Large

**We welcome your suggestions for improving our neighborhood! Let us hear from you!**