

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors of
The Venetian Golf & River Club Community Association, Inc.
Held at the River Club and via Zoom on August 12, 2024**

Board Members attending:

Mark Faford - Co-president
Tom Jones - Co-president
Chip Melvin - Treasurer (present via Zoom)
John Manoush - Secretary
Sharon George - Membership chair
Joe Browne
Roger Effron
Terry Leary
Taras Kowalczyk (present via Zoom)

Dr. Steve Hefler was unable to attend

Guests present: There were 7 residents attending in person and 1 or 2 joined via Zoom.

Call to Order: Mark Faford called the meeting to order at 3:30pm

Secretary's report: The minutes from the July 15, 2024 meeting were unanimously approved.

Public Comment: One resident commented on the fact that the Boardwalk would likely remain closed until around Aug. 22. He is updating the HRT on a regular basis. This prompted some discussion welcoming the resident to draft an article for Parcels about snakes and gators on and around the boardwalk.

Treasurer's report: Chip Melvin reported that our cash balance of \$53,944 is similar to last month's and is not expected to change a great deal until our Fall events begin. Our YTD profit of \$8854 includes the \$8475 return of the traffic study, so we are about even. The legal expenses of approx. \$3000 incurred during the Feb-Apr period are not likely to be repeated.

Membership: Sharon George reported that our membership increased by 9 this month to 883 (64.7%), the highest level since Dec. of 2023. Sharon just sent out letters targeted to 4 groups of homeowners: those who moved here during Covid, those who have never joined, those whose membership has lapsed and those who are new residents (2022-24). Current policy grants new members a "free ride" for the balance of 2024. She and her team (Mark, Joe and Chip) will meet to select dates for new resident orientation, likely in October. It is expected to be more informal than in the past. Sharon also monitors the Wall of Something and reported that there is gradual growth in usage. We had some discussion about the removal of posts for items for sale after a specified period, and agreed that period should be 90 days. Currently, this must be done manually.

Seminar planning: Mark Faford updated the board on plans from the team consisting of Mark, Terry and Steve. Starting in October, there are 18 planned events with firm dates. Repeat events will include Bike-o-Rama, CPR, Shredfest, dog mugs and knife sharpening. New events will include history of Venice, local wildlife rescue and history of the Ringling Circus. The topic of end-of-life doula was discussed. Despite the "grim" topic, the team studied the topic, felt it was of value and recommended it for late Feb. Although the board agreed, a suggestion was made and accepted to also Zoom this seminar because of its sensitivity. The

candidate forum will consist of two sessions on Oct. 7 and will include both the CDD and the City Council. There is a savings of \$900 in videographer costs by having both sessions on the same day. The annual Town Hall, our most costly event, is planned for March 10. A “Knock Your Socks Off” flyer will again be prepared.

External Affairs: **Tom Jones** reported that the Venice Planning Commission hearing on the commercial development, originally planned for Sept. 3, will be delayed with no firm date yet available. Tom, John and Sharon attended an informational meeting hosted by Mitzi Fiedler this morning regarding a so-called “Linear Park”, expected to be an expanded sidewalk on the S side of Laurel that will extend from the new Northeast Park to the Vicenza community on E Laurel. We debated whether the CA should take any action to inform residents of this development and whether residents had an opportunity to comment before the Planning Commission in Sept. Sharon and John recommended that we get involved. Roger, who is on the Citizens Advisory Committee, expressed concern about the CA getting involved through unofficial channels. After discussion, we resolved that Tom would contact Kathleen Weeden (City Engineer) to find out exactly what was planned, what input we could provide, if any, and through what channels. We resolved not to send out any communication to residents until we have clear and authoritative information about this project. **Taras** gave a summary of the Laurel Rd Widening. The County received state funds on July 10 and the process is in motion, with design nearly complete and land acquisition ongoing. **Roger** introduced the topic of the city’s current planning phase for the “Seaboard Initiative”, a major city project involving the rezoning and development of land between the intracoastal and US 41 to the S side of Venice Ave. This area is currently industrial but the city envisions a transition to mixed residential and commercial uses. Our board agreed that it is too far from us for the CA to take an active role; however, information will be placed on our website. An informational article in *Parcels* is also possible.

Website: **Joe Browne** reported that usage of our website continues to be brisk. It did not exceed last month’s near record volume but was well above July of last year. There was a spike in activity after an email was sent to residents about Hurricane Corner. Joe’s report shows the activity for specific web pages, thus giving us a better idea which topics are driving users to the site.

Old Business: **Mark Faford** updated the board on discussions of the Expense Reduction Team, chaired by Chip and including Mark, Joe and Taras. They held a Zoom call today to develop plans for both increasing revenues (Chip and Joe) and reducing expenses (Mark and Taras). Some ideas for raising revenue included paid advertising (esp. *Parcels*), increased dues, contributions at seminars, contributions for website, higher interest for our accounts, revision of membership form to allow for donations, and a donation drive. On the expense reduction, insurance premiums are a primary focus. The team will solicit competitive quotes this fall with the hope of securing a lower premium at renewal time in Jan. Steve, who first raised this idea, has investigated at least one alternative quote that was much lower. Our three most costly events are the Town Hall at \$2100 last year, the candidate forum, expected to cost \$1900 this year, and the Shred Fest at \$1252 last year. The team is looking at all of these events with an eye toward trimming costs. Some ideas included limiting the THM or Shredfest to alternate years. The shredding is the main cost, not the junk hauling. The team plans to present recommendations at our next meeting. Roger suggested we might save the \$1900 on professional video work and have John broadcast and record the candidate forum using the Owl.

Roger reported on collaboration with Terry and Joe in plans to offer sponsorship of each issue of *Parcels*, and projects a fee of \$99 per issue. He expects this could start with the Sept issue.

New Business: **QR Codes – Roger** informed us of his discussions with our printer about devising a QR code that would point to our website, for a one-time cost of \$50. The code will be used on our publications (including *Parcels*) and posters or flyers shown at events. Joe expressed interest in being able to track how many users access our site in this way vs the conventional URL approach, but it is not known at this time if this is possible.

Mark – Limit on eblasts to community. We wish to keep residents informed, but do not wish to dilute the effectiveness of our communications by issuing too many messages. Following an oversight with the announcement for this meeting, we had a prolonged discussion about the best way to announce our meetings so that they contained both agenda and Zoom information. Mark initially proposed that John be provided a license to Constant Contact and be the one to send out the announcements, since he currently obtains the Zoom link. After discussion we backed away from this idea for the simple reason that the CA must pay an additional \$50-55 per month for each licensed user - currently only Roger and Sharon. We instead resolved to transition to a fixed Zoom code such that John does not have to be involved, except for special meetings. We decided that Mark (or Tom) will continue to send the agenda to Roger at least a week before meetings, and the fixed Zoom link will be repeated with every announcement. The Zoom link may even be placed on our website so that residents will be able to access the meeting even if they lack an email invitation. John will obtain and share this so that it may be used for our Sept. meeting. It appears Mary has been handling HRT communications with her personal email lists. Sharon will speak with her to see if the CA may be of assistance in keeping HRT communications up to date.

Board Member Comments: John briefly covered progress of the 3 teams following the retreat, and announced intention to call a meeting of his “relationships” team in the near future (The other teams are Finance and Membership). This team aims to improve the relationships of the CA with influential individuals and organizations both inside and outside the gates. He asked if other board members had heard of the Sarasota County Neighborhood Initiative Grant Program; none had. The program awards a total of nearly \$100K annually in matching grants to organizations that meet its criteria, and those include safety. The HRT might well fit these criteria. The program counts volunteer hours toward its matching requirements at \$20 per hour. John will inform Mary Rau Foster of this possibility and proceed accordingly.

Joe “confessed” that the new advertising policy was not yet on our website, and requested clarification from other board members (Roger, Tom and Terry) on the details of the policy before posting.

Tom reported that he has been reviewing the Venetian drainage / pond system with Jerry Jasper, and would soon assemble some information for our website that residents should find valuable.

Mark requested participation for a planning committee for the Oct. 7 candidate forum. The Sept. *Parcels* will solicit resident questions for the candidates, but we do not anticipate allowing open questions during the forum.

Next Meeting: Our next meeting is on Monday, Sept. 16 at 3:30pm at the River Club. It appears at least 3 board members will be unable to attend in person, but we expect a quorum and will plan on meeting.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by John Manoush, Secretary