

**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 Sept. 16, 2024**

**Board Members attending:**

Mark Faford - Co-president  
Chip Melvin - Treasurer (present via Zoom)  
John Manoush - Secretary  
Joe Browne (present via Zoom)  
Roger Effron  
Terry Leary  
Dr. Steve Hefler  
Taras Kowalczyk (present via Zoom)

Co-president Tom Jones and membership chair Sharon George were unable to attend

**Guests present:** There were 3 residents attending in person and 2 on Zoom.

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

**Secretary's report:** The minutes from the previously distributed August 12, 2024 meeting were unanimously approved.

**Public Comment:** Mark proposed that the CA remove the former 3-minute limit on public comments. Roger followed with a motion to allow up to 5 minutes until the end of 2024, then reevaluate. It passed unanimously.

One resident thanked the CA for doing a "tremendous job". Another resident also complimented the CA on its work and further suggested the CA consider holding its meetings earlier in the day so that more residents might attend. CA board members felt the suggestion was worth pursuing, and Mark asked John to poll the group via email regarding trial of an earlier time for our Oct. 21 meeting.

Roger received many positive comments on the *Parcels* article on snakes that stemmed from a public comment at last month's meeting.

**Treasurer's report:** Chip Melvin described August as a quiet month, with our cash position staying at around \$56,000. Looking at YTD income vs expenses, we show an income of approx. \$9,000 that is almost entirely due to the April return of the traffic study funds from the POA. Chip suggested a change in the way we report membership dues income, preferring to record it in the month actually received. With the current "accrual" method, dues that are paid for 2 and 3-year periods are not reported when received, but rather in the future month they are covering. Other board members had no objections and complimented Chip on the overall job he is doing as treasurer. He will furnish more information on this proposal and tentatively plan on implementing the change in December.

**Membership:** Mark Faford referred to Sharon's report in her absence. As of Sept., we have 886 members, just a few less than same month last year but a few more than last month. Our per cent membership stands at just over 65% of all households. Sharon continues to emphasize outreach to new residents, and plans new resident meeting (dates TBA). She has deleted "Wall" posts for items for sale for over 6 months. Mark asked Joe if he would check with Sharon to offer assistance with maintaining The Wall.

**Seminar planning:** Mark Faford handed out copies of the "Knock Your Socks Off II" brochure and reported that the team, consisting of Steve, Terry and Mark, is close to finalizing the document, which lists 19 events.

He asked board members to give it a close review and report any concerns by Wednesday, 9/18. When finalized, a digital copy will be provided to Joe for the website. An unscheduled 9-11 tribute was held this year and will likely be continued. The plan is to send the “Socks” brochure to residents *via* email in early October and to provide printed copies in the River Club and at events. The candidate forum on Oct. 7 will include City Council candidates at 10 and 11 o’clock, followed by CDD candidates at 1 and 2. All candidates have accepted our invitation with the exception of one unopposed CDD candidate who will be out of the country. Questions for candidates should be submitted to Mark by this Weds, 9/18. The Town Hall is March 10.

Mark asked board members to volunteer as leaders or backups for each event. There will be a membership table as in the past. The candidate forum moderators have been selected but we still need greeters and a timekeeper. Sign-ups will be required for a few events as shown on the flyer.

**External Affairs:** **Taras** reported on the status of the Laurel Rd widening. He has spoken to the director of County Public Works, who reported that approvals and funds are aligned and that contractor bids are being solicited. A firm timetable is not yet available and it is possible that budget changes may be necessary after the bidding. In Tom’s absence, he reported on a “multimodal transportation plan workshop” that Tom recently attended at City Hall, soliciting stakeholder input on the planned strengthening of Venice’s total transportation infrastructure. Plans for the Northeast Park are progressing, with contractor bids being sought and a 2025 start anticipated.

**John** has been monitoring upcoming meetings of the City Council and Planning Commission and reported that there are no upcoming meetings that directly impact The Venetian, but some of peripheral concern. The planning board will be reviewing a site plan on 9/20 concerning a 124-unit “Echo Suites” hotel planned for the Mirasol area near Laurel and Knights Trail (note: John mistakenly stated the location was at E. Venice and Center Streets). There will also be a joint meeting with the Historic Preservation Board on 9/19 to consider proposed revisions to the City’s LDR’s. The City Council meeting on 9/24 will focus on review of the 2025 budget.

**Roger** recommended that the External committee provide our board with more frequent communications on relevant issues rather than wait for monthly meetings. With no disagreement voiced, the External committee will use its judgment to provide more timely information on issues of interest.

**Website:** **Joe Browne** reported that August web page views were 29% higher than the same month in 2023 and users were up by 57%, continuing a trend of steady upward usage of our web site. He asked board members to alert him whenever they experience a “broken link” on the site. He will correct these promptly but finds it difficult to continually monitor all of the many links. Roger requested a short report on the progress of the website from Joe that might be used for a *Parcels* article. He also asked if our website could accommodate videos (possibly for membership) and Joe felt it was likely, noting that it already contains the Wall of Something video instructions created by Michelle Trent.

**Old Business:** **Mark Faford** discussed expense reduction opportunities. Insurance premium reduction appears to be the most promising opportunity, and competitive bids will be sought this fall. Opportunities to reduce some event costs will be researched, though there does not appear to be any obvious short-term opportunity. We do not want to reduce costs at the expense of the quality of the event.

Mark felt that revenue enhancement was more likely than expense reduction to help our bottom line. Chip reported on 3 opportunities: membership (dues, contributions), sponsorships (of *Parcels* or possibly events), and grants. He has found there are many grants available for emergency management services such as our HRT. John reported that he discussed the Sarasota County Initiative Grant program with Mary Rau Foster shortly after bringing it up at last month’s board meeting. After looking into it, Mary decided not to pursue it because the HRT did not have any significant unmet financial needs and because the application and follow-up requirements were burdensome. Nonetheless, the board consensus was that we should keep an open mind, both for the HRT and for other opportunities yet to be identified. Roger mentioned the Suncoast Community

Foundation as another potential source of grants and volunteered to gather more information on it. Steve and Marcia Hefler sponsored last month's *Parcels* and Mark has been contacted by a resident about sponsoring next month's. Several people felt the visibility of the sponsorship should be more prominent than its current location at the bottom of each page. Roger will work with our graphics person to investigate alternative methods that would increase visibility.

**New Business:** John reported on activities of the Outreach committee, consisting of Steve, Roger, Tom, Terry and himself. On behalf of the team, he presented two proposals aimed at increasing visibility and engagement of the CA (brief written descriptions of both proposals were previously emailed to board members). The first, called "Outreach", aims to make a more concerted effort to have one or more CA board members attend meetings of other boards, both inside and outside the Venetian. Where appropriate, we should make comments that would be viewed as positive and constructive by both the other boards and by the public. It remains to systematize this proposal, but initially John will consult with our co-presidents and contact other board members to encourage a presence and an appropriate message. This does not mean we will refrain from critical comments, but that we will devote more effort to find opportunities to be constructive. The other proposal, described by Roger, is called "Reach Out". The CA will remain alert as to when residents experience significant life events, such as deaths or recognition of achievements, and to acknowledge them with an appropriate card on behalf of the CA. Roger has identified a volunteer outside of our board who has offered to assist in this initiative. This will not be publicized, but is simply an effort to let residents know that others care about them.

Joe asked for more clarity on the existence and activities of CA committees, or teams, most of which are outgrowths of our two retreats. Currently there is the Outreach Team just discussed, but also the External Affairs, Finance and Membership committees. A Communications team formed after the 2023 retreat accomplished its objectives and no longer meets. Following each retreat, John wrote up summaries that explained each team's purpose and listed its members; but not all teams currently meet regularly. We have left it up to each team leader to determine whether ongoing meetings are needed, whether they collaborate informally or whether the team is no longer needed.

**Board Member Comments:** Steve initiated the Reach Out initiative by sending a card to resident Bonnie Pandya, mother of astronaut Suni Williams, currently "stuck in space". She was most appreciative. John asked that all board members make a concerted effort to invite friends and neighbors to help out at CA activities when appropriate. He felt this fit with the Outreach initiative and would have the benefit of being a good "training ground" for future board members without requiring any commitment. Roger complimented Mark and Terry for quickly organizing the recent 9-11 event – a new initiative that will no doubt be continued. The Venice Fire Department was present at that event, further deepening our relationship with city organizations. Taras felt the recent introduction of QR codes was being well-received.

**Next Meeting:** Our next meeting is on Monday, Oct. 21 at the River Club, with the time TBA as reported in the Public Comment section above.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by John Manoush, Secretary