

ALL RESIDENTS WELCOME

Coming to the monthly meetings gives you an opportunity to find out what's going on and helps us to know your problems and concerns. Many of our regulars have a wide range of experience in dealing with the same sort of problem you may be experiencing and can usually help you find a way to resolve the issue. Join us on the second Monday of each month, 7:00 p.m. at Candlelight Park, 1520 Candlelight Boulevard, at the intersection of Oak Forest and Candlelight, and find out what's going on. If you have not already paid your voluntary dues for 2004, please send your check for \$20 to: OFHA INC., P.O. Box 920561, Houston, TX 77292-0561.

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Additional donation enclosed for: Tree Fund Esplanade Improvements Citizens on Patrol

OAK FOREST HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.
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HOUSTON TX 77292-0561



HAVE YOU SEEN THE NEW TREES?

OFHA has recently planted trees on Antoine Drive and 43rd Street. We're trying to fill our esplanades with the natural beauty that makes Oak Forest special. To do that, we need your help. We need you to join OFHA. Membership is only \$20 a year and the more members we have, the more we can do. So join today.

H E L P U S M A I N T A I N T H E U R B A N W O O D S

OAK FOREST

HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2004

OAK FOREST IS DEED RESTRICTED

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Greg Ryden

Oak Forest is deed restricted and has been since its inception. The signs on the streets leading into the neighborhood say it, the newsletters say it, and the title company or realtor you purchased your home through should have told you about the deed restrictions.

The deed restrictions are enforceable, and will continue to be enforced by the OFHA. We don't intend for them to be such a large part of the organization, and we don't enforce them because we want to, we do it because we have to. The deed restrictions ensure that your neighbor's house doesn't become a retail center or used car lot. They ensure that not more than one home is ever put on one lot (all have been tried in the past and only the deed restrictions kept them out). Most of all, deed restrictions ensure that the reason you bought your home, whether it be for charm, character, value, that all of those reasons and more are protected. Without them, the neighborhood becomes vulnerable to a whole host of problems.

Unfortunately, Oak Forest Deed Restrictions are an often overlooked requirement when building in the neighborhood. Due to the former lax requirements of the City of Houston Planning Department in permitting construction, what may pass the City's test for acceptable would not pass Oak Forest's higher standard.

Setback violations are the largest target that faces this neighborhood. Setbacks in each section are determined by your deed restrictions which are also now available online. Become familiar with your section and have your architect or contractor consult them before designing, submitting to the Architectural Review committee (*related article on Page 2*) and applying for a City of Houston building permit.

To help combat these problem, on May 18th, OFHA representatives including myself addressed Mayor Bill White and the City Council about the issue of deed restrictions and the violations thereof in Oak Forest. We have been constantly working with Council Member Lawrence's office to ensure that progress is made in curbing violations in Oak Forest. We have recently seen progress from this administration in the form of a revised permitting process within the City's Planning Department. All new construction must comply with its neighborhood's deed restrictions (*related article on Page 3*). This is good news for you and the character of Oak Forest in particular. It also ensures that property values will continue to climb by preventing questionable construction practices.

In a city with no zoning, deed restrictions are one of the major factors that contribute to the security of the property you own. Help keep the Urban Woods a viable, livable neighborhood. The OFHA is here to serve you. If you have any questions or comments about our work, contact me at greg@ofha.org.

MEMBERS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

by Zack Derryberry

The Oak Forest Homeowners Association Executive Board would like to say thank you to the 436 Oak Forest households who have paid their annual membership dues thus far in 2004. We are well on our way to having 900 paid memberships for the year, consisting of renewal memberships and new OFHA members. Your dues are vital to OFHA's financial survival and are used to support neighborhood initiatives such as esplanade beautification, our quarterly newsletter, and other projects promoting Oak Forest.

Membership in OFHA is only \$20 annually and is voluntary. Your voluntary membership dues are payable each January and memberships are effective January 1 and expires December 31. Only members who pay their annual dues by July 1st of each year are eligible to participate in the Association's General Election each November.

In an effort to better communicate your current OFHA membership status, we have printed your current status on the front of your newsletter. To those of you who see "Please Join OFHA," joining is as easy as mailing a \$20 check to OFHA. If every household in Oak Forest contributed their \$20 yearly, we'd have over \$100,000 for projects and beautification in our neighborhood. Think of the possibilities.

To date, the OFHA has deposited \$11,000 in membership dues and donations and OFHA capital expenditures total \$10,800. Our 2004 annual budget projections reflect that we will still spend an additional \$9,800 in 2004 on newsletters, ongoing neighborhood projects, and insurance. While we do retain a capital surplus account, it's easy to see that we need your help!

We encourage each of you to join OFHA and become an active member. How else could \$20 go so far toward protecting and enhancing one of your most valuable assets? Please take the time and join the Oak Forest Homeowners Association today. Thanks again for your support.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Meetings of the Oak Forest Homeowners Association are held at the Candlelight Park clubhouse in Candlelight Park located at 1520 Candlelight Blvd.

Dates of upcoming meetings are:

- **July 12** - *Guest Speaker*, State Rep. Dwayne Bohac
- **August 9** - *Guest Speaker*, Reginald Mack from HISD, to discuss the new Oak Forest Elementary currently under construction.
- **September 13** - *Guest Speaker*, TBA

OAK FOREST'S BEAUTIFUL HOME WINNER FOR SUMMER 2004

by Stephanie Cox

In an effort to encourage the preservation of our historical community, the Oak Forest Homeowners Association has begun a new program of awarding the honor of *Beautiful Home* to owners who have done an outstanding job of beautifying their home.

The Oak Forest Homeowners Association is committed to improving the beautification of our neighborhood. Because Oak Forest has long since surpassed its fiftieth birthday, many of its homes are in need of restoration. Enhancing the aesthetics of neighborhood homes and yards enhances the value of our neighborhood in addition to setting an inspiring example to the surrounding community.

The selection of one Beautiful Home will be made once per quarter by the Public Relations Committee. The homeowners will be given an *OFHA Beautiful Home* sign to put in their front yard and a letter of appreciation from the homeowners association.

For the summer quarter, we've selected the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Taylor at 4433 Nina Lee as the Oak Forest's *Beautiful Home* for Summer 2004. Congratulations! Go to www.ofha.com to view a picture of the Taylor's home.

For future awards, we'd like to invite the community to submit your nomination for Beautiful Home. Please provide the address and homeowners' name(s), if known. We'll accept nominations until September 1, 2004. Send your nominations to the committee chair via email at angelica@ofha.org or call the hotline at 713-688-OFHA.

BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Beautification Committee would like to invite all residents to participate in the month of July's *Beautification Saturday* on July 31, 2004. We will be meeting at 9am at the intersection of Acorn Street and Antoine Drive. We will be spreading mulch and taking care of the 20 trees we recently planted.

We've had similar beautification events in the past, but have decided to make them a monthly scheduled event. Your neighborhood needs your help. Join us on the last Saturday of every month to improve the natural beauty of Oak Forest.

You can also help the Beautification Committee by joining OFHA and contributing to Esplanade Improvements or the Tree Fund. The more support we have, the more improvements we can make. If you would like to get involved with the Beautification Committee and for future meeting times and event locations, contact Wes Jones at wes@ofha.org.

YAHOO NEWSGROUP

The Oak Forest Yahoo newsgroup is the fastest, most efficient method to get information on activities in the Oak Forest community. The group provides notices to residents of upcoming events and provides a place to ask questions or raise issues of interest to the Oak Forest community. Membership is restricted to residents and property owners only, and the group is moderated.

To subscribe, send an email to OFHA-subscribe@yahoo.com or email us a hotline@ofha.org

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PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE (PRC) UPDATE

As you may know, the Oak Forest Homeowners Association PRC was formed to recruit more members in order to further accomplish the organization's mission, and trying to gain more support and involvement from our local community.

A recent event was a membership drive on June 26th at Kroger, located at 1352 W. 43rd Street. We were there from 10:00am to 4:00pm. Yummy snow cones were passed to all who stopped by our table. Look for other events from the PRC coming soon!

NEW OFHA ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW PROCEDURES FOR OAK FOREST

With the advent of new permitting procedures and additional requests for plan reviews come new Oak Forest Architectural Review Procedures. In an effort to help streamline the process, a submission form is now available online at www.ofha.org/arch_committee. This form will allow the Architectural Review Committee to expedite the review process by contacting the appropriate party to answer questions or arrange for pickup.

This form should be submitted along with the requested material directly to the Architectural Committee chairman Richard Rabe at 1725 Saxon Drive. You can contact Richard for delivery at 713-681-1133 or by email at richard@ofha.org. An Architectural Review usually takes no more than a few days to approve plans.

More info is available online at www.ofha.org/arch_committee. Deed Restrictions are also now available online at www.ofha.org/deed and still available at the Oak Forest Branch of the Houston Public Library. Questions about the submission and review process should be directed to Richard Rabe at richard@ofha.org.

VIEW YOUR DEED RESTRICTIONS ONLINE
www.ofha.org/deed

PROPERTY TAX APPEALS

by Isabel Nart

Many homeowners are challenging the appraisal values proposed by the Harris County Appraisal District (HCAD) on their homes. Although the HCAD is legally required to base appraisals on market value, many taxpayers believe that they could not sell the homes for the appraised value, and have filed appeals. The deadline for filing 2004 value protests was June 1st.

Protest filers can improve their chances of successfully lowering their appraised values with preparation and research. To win a reduction, the taxpayer must prove one of two things. Either the house is worth less than the appraised value (excessive valuation) or the home is not appraised like similar properties (unequal valuation). Taxpayers should appeal on both grounds.

The HCAD is required to give protesters all the information it intends to use in making its case that the value is appropriate. Taxpayers should review this information to prepare arguments for lowering the appraisal. They should also review the property information that the HCAD has regarding the property. Are the number of square feet correct? How about number of bedrooms and bathrooms?

To contest an excessive valuation, the taxpayer must show why the house is appraised too high. Does the structure have a problem, like a cracked slab, a worn-out air conditioner, or flood damage? Photographs of the damage or repair estimates are good evidence to present. Do you know of similar homes in the area that recently sold for less? If so, present that evidence.

To protest an unequal valuation, the taxpayer must prove that his value is out of line with other similar houses in the neighborhood. Check to see what your neighbors' homes are appraised for on the HCAD web page. Also, check the sales price of nearby properties that sold recently. If similar houses in the area sold for less than the appraisal, present this as evidence.

Hearings have already started, and will continue throughout the summer. Taxpayers who filed timely protests will receive a hearing notice about three weeks prior to their hearing date. It is important that protesting taxpayers attend the hearing. This is usually an informal hearing. Taxpayers that are still dissatisfied can schedule a formal hearing before the Appraisal Review Board. This is a group of citizens authorized to resolve disputes between taxpayers and appraisal districts. The only recourse after this is to file a lawsuit in state district court.

When attending the hearings, act in a professional manner and be courteous. The hearing personnel have been listening to complaints for a long time and will appreciate taxpayers who are polite. This is not the place to go rant about "high taxes," "wasteful spending," etc. The purpose is to try to work out a compromise on the value.

Comptroller of Public Accounts Carole Strayhorn has included helpful information on protesting tax appeals on her website. For web links to this and other websites, visit the OFHA website at www.ofha.org. Good luck! Also, remember to apply for your homestead exemption.

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CITY TO VERIFY ALL BUILDING PERMITS COMPLY WITH DEED RESTRICTIONS

In order to protect neighborhood character and property values, the City of Houston is cooperating with citizens to ensure building permits are not issued in violation of deed restrictions. Beginning Tuesday, June 15, 2004, all building permit applications will be verified for compliance with deed restrictions.

When applying for a building permit, the application needs to have the correct legal description, including the subdivision name, and the Deed Restriction Affidavit on the back of permit must be filled out. Customer service representatives will check the subdivision listed on your permit application against a database index of restrictions. All construction projects in Oak Forest must be in compliance with the Oak Forest Deed Restriction for your section. You can download a copy of your section's deed restriction by going to www.ofha.org/deed.

If your information does not match what is reported in the database, your permit application will be sent to the City's Legal Department to verify compliance. This may delay your project.

You may not purchase a building permit without signing a sworn deed restriction affidavit stating that you are aware of and agree to abide by deed restrictions pertaining to your project. If you knowingly or unknowingly sign the deed restriction affidavit under false pretenses, you could be subject to municipal court citations, fines, and the removal of the structure or violating portion thereof.

If you have any questions concerning Oak Forest deed restrictions, contact Richard Rabe at richard@ofha.org or 713-688-OFHA.

HOW TO DEAL WITH CONTINUOUS GARAGE SALES

We recently have been asked by homeowners if there is anything that can be done about residents who have continuous garage/yard sales week after week. State law allows a household to have 2 garage/yard sales per year. Any more and they are required to have a license from both the City and State. Violations can be reported to the Office of the State Comptroller, 713-868-9112. After 2 garage/yard sales, the resident is then considered to be operating a business. Oak Forest deed restrictions do not permit commercial businesses on residential lots.

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