



HICKORY RIDGE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
Village Board Meeting Minutes
June 23, 2025, at 7:30pm

Meeting recording: https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/hBG_C-JBIMrcCIDTpL8jXJQnxUfwzDbWyBKfA-VfK0ISpvtAlGHY9AlBrzeuSRKk.AazF5uZ_nJ8zeW79?startTime=1750721125000

Members Present: Steve Hannan, Mark Covington, Mike McGarity, Mariah Robertson and Skye Anderson. Ms. Amari had an excused absence.

Staff Present: Laura Mayton & Emily Rieger

Guests: About 15 attendees, both in-person and virtual

Call to Order: 7:30pm

1. **Approval of Agenda:** Dr. Robertson made a motion to approve the agenda and Mr. McGarity seconded. Ms. Mayton requested to add Mr. McGarity's Infertility Grant Proposal to New Business, 6. f. Dr. Robertson made a motion to add Ms. Mayton's request and approve the agenda, as amended. Mr. McGarity seconded. The amended agenda was approved unanimously.
2. **Approval of May 12, 2025, Board Meeting Minutes:** Dr. Robertson made a motion to approve the May 12, 2025, Board Meeting minutes. Mr. McGarity seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.
3. **Board Update:** Dr. Robertson mentioned that she attended a nice event hosted by the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center and she encouraged Board members and residents to attend the snack bag stuffing event happening on July 2nd from 7-8pm at The Hawthorn Center. Ms. Anderson shared that the 2025 Howard County Office on Aging and Independence Resource Guide features a resident of Hickory Ridge on the cover. Mr. McGarity commented about the recent spirited CA CNSL meet hosted by the Clemens Crossing Cyclones against the CHS Sundevils.
4. **Resident Speak-Out:** Ms. Grier announced that the 2025 Maryland Senior Olympics Track & Field meet will be held at HCC the weekend of June 28th. She also expressed interest in receiving feedback from residents about any challenging areas along CA pathways that might pose difficulties for seniors. Ms. Lancos mentioned the Columbia Triathlon, a portion of which took place at Clemens Crossing pool, and noted the lack of communication about the event from CA.
5. **CA Board of Directors Report—Skye Anderson:** Ms. Anderson reported the completion of the LPP Loop basketball court project and noted that the CA Points Program end-of-year picnic was well attended.
6. **New Business:**
 - a. **Howard County Police Citizens Advisory Council (Camella Williams, Hickory Ridge Liaison).** Ms. Williams, a resident of Clary's Forest, introduced herself and provided a brief overview of the Advisory Council—its mission, goals, and community activities. She also expressed her willingness to serve as a resource to the Board.
 - b. **Election Committee Report:** Mr. Warner, on behalf of the Election Committee, presented the report, highlighting the success of the mail-in ballot and the need for better publicizing

election rules. Ms. Lancos expressed concerns about the current election rules, suggesting a return to previous campaign finance rules. Ms. Clutts added that the Election Committee should issue statements denouncing violations of election rules. The Board discussed the need for a balanced approach that encourages participation while maintaining fairness and transparency.

- c. Reappointments to the Resident Architectural Committee to Include: Bob Opatovsky, Celindah Grier, Barbara Condron, Shane Lease and Matthew Heyne:** Dr. Robertson made a motion to reappoint the members. Mr. McGarity seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- d. Appointments to the Architectural Committee to Include Celindah Grier, Matthew Heyne, and Three Board Members:** The Board discussed who should have this role, ultimately deciding on Dr. Robertson, Mr. McGarity and Ms. Amari. Dr. Robertson made a motion to appoint the three Board members. Mr. Hannan seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- e. Appointments to the Hickory Ridge Watershed Advisory Committee to Include: Deborah Wessner, Jerry Lioi, Vanessa Mims, Donna Warner, Leah Donovan and Bill Richardson:** Mr. McGarity made a motion to appoint the members. Dr. Robertson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- f. Teen Event at The Hawthorn Center & Infertility Grant Proposal (Micajah McGarity):** Mr. McGarity proposed establishing a team event for middle school students at the Hawthorn Center to address the lack of structured social activities. The proposal was tabled for further discussion at the next meeting. Mr. McGarity introduced the idea of providing a \$500 grant for infertility treatments for a resident of Hickory Ridge. The Board discussed and the discussion concluded with a decision to revisit the infertility grant proposal at the next meeting.

7. Old Business: None

8. Manager Report—Laura Mayton: Ms. Mayton shared information on Block Party grants and the process for requesting them. Ms. Mayton informed the Board of a roof leak that is being addressed in coordination with CA. She clarified that the issue does not impact rentals or the facility's hours of operation. Additionally, she mentioned that the center will be operating with limited staff this week due to personal obligations among team members.

9. Action Items

- a. Ms. Mayton will add teen night, fertility grant and candidate requirements for elections to the next agenda

10. Adjournment: Dr. Robertson made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. McGarity seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:17pm.

HRCA 2025 Election Summary

The 2025 Hickory Ridge Village (Homeowner's Association) elections featured one contested position for Columbia Council. It was the first Village election conducted under Board approved rules to eliminate individual candidate campaign expenditures.

The Election Committee organized and held two separate candidate forums; one on-line and one in-person. The Committee feels these were successful events. The Village produced yard signs promoting the elections as well as flyers listing the candidates and including their published statements.

Residents voted using both absentee ballots and in person at the Friday evening Community event and on Election Day. Vote tallying by the Election Committee members proceeded smoothly following the Board Meeting on 26 April and the winner announced shortly thereafter. There were no challenges regarding the election results.

Election Issues :

1. The Village mailed postcard-sized self-addressed absentee ballots to each Hickory Ridge household. Most voting residents chose to drop these cards at the Village office. The return rate of the cards (which required stamps) via the US postal service was about 40%.

Recommendation: The fact that some residents chose to return their ballots via mail is enough argument to maintain it. The Committee recommends that we continue to explore a "pre-stamped" return card in hopes of generating further participation.

2. Despite the fact that the HRV CA Council seat was the only contested position, there were a number of instances of questionable activities, as follows:
 - an unsolicited email was issued by a resident endorsing a specific candidate. This email was signed by a current member of the Village Board, a former Board member, and the author, a former CA council representative. It was determined that a 2018 publicly accessible document was used to obtain the email addresses. The candidate denied knowledge of this e-mail.
 - flyers promoting the same candidate were distributed throughout the Village. These flyers were unattributed, stating only that it was authored by a "group of active residents".
 - additional flyers (slightly altered) were distributed by a former Board member
 - these same flyers were distributed by a CA Council representative from another Village

All of these activities were reported to the Election Committee which, in conjunction with the HRV Manager, determined that no violation of election rules had taken place.

3. Thoughts on the way forward (under current election rules)

The Election Committee feels strongly that the above noted activities are not in alignment with the spirit and intent of the HRV Board and CA Council elections. If the Board wishes to maintain the current election process, the Committee recommends that they task the Committee, prior to the 2026 election cycle, to augment the election process to further clarify the HRV position on electioneering. These may possibly include:

- stipulating that sitting Board members remain publicly neutral regarding candidates for seats other than those for which they may be competing
- "watermarking" and promoting HRV-produced materials to ensure residents recognize those materials are in compliance with election standards
- publicize the election rules
- stipulating that individuals/groups choosing to generate and distribute non-HRV election materials identify themselves as the authors of those materials (demonstrating that they are indeed residents of the Village)
- asking that these individuals or groups inform the promoted candidate of their activities to at minimum allow their review of attributed statements
- publicly asking that other Village CA Council members refrain from active involvement in HRV elections
- recommending that unsolicited campaign emails to residents provide details as to how their email addresses were acquired.

The Election Committee is fully aware that most, if not all, of these conditions are not enforceable. The Committee is also aware of the rights accorded to every citizen to exercise freedom of speech. That said, the "no candidate spending" rules were geared toward promoting a fair and level environment for all candidates, as well as relieve candidates of the burdensome paperwork associated with the solicitation and expenditure of campaign funds.

4. Other Options:

The Board could return to the 2022 method. This process capped contribution and spending by candidates to \$250. Candidates were free to campaign as they wished, to include pooling campaign funds to run on slates. Winning candidates were

required to sign financial disclosure paperwork which contained a submission deadline. This method caused significant issues in 2023 when a winning incumbent candidate failed to submit their paperwork on time but insisted on maintaining a seat on the Board.

The Board could also opt to return to the election process that existed prior to 2021. This process levied no limitations on any candidate. There were no pledges or forms to submit, allowing candidates to campaign in a manner they desired. This option remains the most uncomplicated but could lend an advantage to a candidate with the means and willingness to devote increased resources to their campaign -- an issue that led to the formation of a special election committee in 2022 and a host of changes in the election process.

The Committee freely admits there is no perfect system nor is there a process that eliminates the ability for residents, well-intentioned or otherwise, from attempting to sway votes. This takes place at every level of governance. Residents have argued that the current system, which disallows campaign expenditures by candidates and recommends against campaign expenditures by other for specific candidates, puts the rule "followers" at a distinct disadvantage against those who choose to behave otherwise. So the Board needs to decide on a spirit and direction for elections that can maximize fairness for all candidates while maintaining individual residents' rights to conduct election activities.

Action:

The Board decide by 30 September to:

- a. maintain current process with Election Committee recommendations for improvement as stated in section 3. (Committee recommendation)
- b. maintain current process with no changes
- c. return to a previous election process

Thank you for your attention to this report and your service to the Hickory Ridge residents.

2025 Election Committee

Don Warner
Celindah Grier
Kathleen Hill
Nemo Lionikis
Wendy Steward

Presented at Hickory Ridge Village Board meeting on June 23, 2025

TO: Hickory Ridge Village Board

I have written letters and spoken to the Village Board several times regarding my concerns about the village election requirements.

In January, I asked the Board to reconsider the requirements that candidates sign a Campaign Pledge vowing to accept no campaign contributions and to not produce or accept campaign materials not provided by the village.

In April, I notified the village of violations of that pledge by a candidate. I once again asked the Board to remove the requirements of the Campaign Pledge.

The Election Committee has now weighed in on the issue. They note that the behavior of some candidates and even other Board members was not in keeping with the spirit and intent of the rules. Nevertheless, they want to maintain the rules and, perhaps, more strongly indicate to everyone that they should “play nice.”

It is incredibly ironic to me that the very people who installed and advocated for rules to restrict campaign donations and types of materials are the ones who broke the rules. Even the previous rules which required campaign finance reports were minimally followed by several who made those rules. The chair of the Election Committee who made the finance rules was the candidate who failed to file his report on time. That newly elected Board chose to give him a pass on his late filing and allowed him to serve.

None of these rules can be enforced. They only create more work for village staff. The rules are in response to a one-off situation that is unlikely to be repeated. No other village requires so many onerous hoops to jump through to get elected and then be certified. Those who break the rules can plead ignorance. Those that follow the rules are at a disadvantage as they have no means of responding to the negative material that is distributed.

The stated purpose of the Pledge is to “remove barriers to full participation by candidates and voters.” I believe these rules create animosity. They discourage candidates from running for office and residents from engaging in reasonable discussion about the qualifications of candidates.

Please choose recommendation “C” and return to the previous election process where candidates can advocate for themselves and residents can offer their support.

Joan Lancos

6.23.25