Ghent Neighborhood League Minutes
January 25, 2018

Next Meeting: February 15, 2018, 6:30 PM, The Williams School

I. Call to order and introductions

President Mike Spencer called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm. After welcoming the membership, those in attendance introduced themselves. Council members Dr. Whibley and Ms. McClellan attended. From the Ghent Dog Park Association were the President, Vice President, and Treasurer. Also present were Nate Kinnison (running for School Board), Courtney Doyle and Donald Roby (running for Norfolk City Council, Ward 2), and visitors from Meadowbrook and Larchmont. Ryan Murphy, a reporter for Virginian-Pilot, attended the meeting.

Board members present: JR Montalvo, Karen Reynes, Catherine Kilduff, Nat McCormick, George Kello, Dan Ross-Li, Emily Birknes, Paige Rose, Tyler Sherwin

Absent: Ben Crumpler, Larry Brett

President Mike Spencer asked for a motion to approve the minutes, Karen Reynes moved and it was seconded. The minutes were approved.

II. Safety Report – Community Resources Officer (CRO) Samantha Perez

a. Report: November – December was an outstanding month, with 5 larcenies, only two car larcenies, one larceny shoplifting, one commercial robbery at the 7-Eleven. The period December 25 – Jan 21 was not as good with school out. The 700 block of Stockley was hit with package thefts.

b. Package thefts: Ghent is a targeted area throughout the holiday season. Package stings help; if you are willing to let the department use the house for a sting, email Officer Perez. They will call in advance, make sure you’re not expecting an actual package being delivered, and have no children at home.

c. Car theft: In one vehicle theft the owners left the keys in the vehicle; another was actually towed by the city for parking tickets so it wasn’t an actual theft. To avoid window breakage, leave nothing. Even your gym bag with sneakers in it will prompt a break in.

d. Dog park: Office Perez has been tasked with getting the laws amended, so will stick around to listen to the conversation. She is trying to find the middle ground.

e. Homeless people: More issues on the business corridor and on Colley. Has anyone had a problem here? (No response.)
f. **Active threat training:** Norfolk Police Department is providing active threat training to churches and church-goers Mar. 24, 9-1 pm at Calgary Revival Church. Citizens are required to register. It’s very good information. It is max capacity of 2000 and it will be full. She will pass that information along once it is provided.

g. *Please ask a Board member if you want her phone number because she is giving it out and asks us not to call past 8 pm.*

**Q:** How can we identify legitimate plain-car and plain-clothes Amazon deliverers versus someone with ill will?

**A:** They do have badges/identification, but they are not usually wearing them. FedEx will use U-Haul and plain white trucks. UPS does not use anything other than brown trucks.

**Q:** Could the City write a letter to Amazon?

**A** (from Dr. Whibley): The City already requires solicitors to have identification that they carry on them.

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**III. Guest Speakers**

None as printed on the agenda. Present are both Courtney Doyle and Donald Roby, candidates for Norfolk City Council, Ward 2. Nate Kinnison is running for School Board. All will be invited back for the February meeting and will give their platform at that meeting.

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**IV. President’s Report**

The Army Corps is interested in how to increase public access to Fort Norfolk. We talked about doing that through education, history, etc. There is a stakeholder tour coming up, but with limited access. As the conversation continues, we will push the information out to members.

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**V. Reports of Officers and Standing Committees**

a. **Treasurer Report** – None.

b. **Membership Report** – We are developing a new website and hope to launch it in the next few weeks. The intent is to make it a landing page with links to appropriate documents elsewhere and with the hope that it is easier to navigate.

c. **Project Review** – has been light over the past few months. In January, just one residential project for site improvements; what was approved was replacement of an existing driveway at 616 Redgate. Another project was included in discussion on Jan. 22, a rear porch, and because it was out of sight from roadway was of lesser concern, at 404 Warren Crescent. No items were scheduled for next
meeting in February so the meeting was cancelled. Commercial: No Ghent projects are on the January meeting or on the proposed February agenda.

d. **Community Improvement** – A new committee of the board was established to monitor the tree discussion in the neighborhood. We value forestation and are concerned trees are “timing out” and want to be active and supportive partners with the City to address this. George Kello will chair it. Members will include Dan Ross-Li, Bob Kelly (master gardner), Paige Rose, and Emily Birknes. There is a fruit and nut tree giveaway coming up (per Council member Andria McLellan).

e. **GBA** – Met as a board on Dec. 21:

   i. Will continue to monitor homelessness and how they can partner with the office of homelessness to provide for people in need.

   ii. Two bike repair locations will be installed, one in the virge near Blair and one near Decorum on 21st street. Bike racks are still to-be-installed.

   iii. GBA is working with Dominion Power to install snowflake lights for holidays. The annual street cleanup will be in April.

   iv. Annual gala will be Feb. 8 from 6-9 pm; tickets are $25 each.

   v. Downtown Norfolk Council will have Paul Philian to introduce the bike share program to be launched in April. A second speaker will the interim director of the Elizabeth River Trail. The meeting is Feb. 7 at 8 am; 8:30 presentation; ticket was $25 and includes breakfast.

   vi. Regarding the porch pirates, 30 neighbors availed themselves of 21Century’s office to use as a location for delivery of packages.

f. **Dr. Whibley** – The City Council passed the zoning ordinance. This is really groundbreaking and the Council is fighting rising seas. This is a concrete step to increase resilience. They also adopted a Mayor’s Commission, which will include inventorying greenhouse gas emissions. They are not tearing down half the public housing anytime soon; they are simply pursuing funding for mixed use.

g. **Councilwoman McClellan** – Engage Norfolk; Turn your civic passion into action.

VI. Reports of Special Committees

a. **Dog Park** – Daryl Crittenden of Parks and Rec will be here next month at the meeting. That will be the next piece in this conversation for the GNL.
President Mike Spencer started the discussion by saying that GNL was supportive of the dog park when it was first formed. We are a community that likes to resolve issues in a way that is supportive of all members of the communities and facilitate working through these things. There is a 30 minute cap on the discussion; no one can speak twice until everyone speaks once; there is a cap on 2 minutes per speaker.

Dan McNamara, President of the Dog Park since August: Issues lately have had to do with dog park hours. We’ve done a good deal of research; we have a petition with about 270 signatures collected partially online and partially in person. We recognize there are criticisms but submit that the benefit of the dog park exceeds that. We knocked on every door on Stockley Gardens on the 3 blocks. Of the people reached, 10 support the park, 2 people are dissatisfied, and one later said s/he was in support and moved there for the dog park. They considered alternatives. Most of the people using the park do so after work hours. Most of the complaints about the park were for barking in the morning hours. We’ve had conversation with the Norfolk Police Department, who expressed a reluctance in arresting people who are letting dogs run after work. Ideas include increasing communication with residents. At the end of the day the best way to have people not break the law is to change the law to make it more reasonable because for the most part these are law-abiding citizens. Put a personal face on this; if someone is bothering you, approach them and tell them exactly how they can be better. Changing the culture of the park is needed here so that it’s accessible to those people most in need of using it and those people are able to comply with the laws.

The Ghent Dog Park Association does have a phone number that people can call. The new board has done a great job of updating the signs in the park to include information for animal control and the board’s phone number. They are very responsive on Facebook.

Officer Perez: Changing hours was discussed in November. My command is adamant that I bring this to the task force. Police Department proposed 7 am – 7 pm, year-round. The command thinks this is middle-ground for winter/summer. This would be city-wide. Who is in favor? (Poll at the end of the night.)

Larry: I’ve been in my home since 1995 and was questioned when the park went in. From my perspective, there are three types of hours: (1) those on the sign (sunrise to sunset); when wet, it’s closed and open at the other times; (2) those enforced by parks and recs, and those are hours with enforcement. The park is secured at 5 and open at 7 pm; (3) the majority hours for the last decade, which is 24/7. If you look at Google reviews, there is a chart of popular times. Popular times go to 3 am and 4 am. The choice for me is do I want to go for a ten-hour window with barking dogs and talking people in front of my house or a 14-hour window. The answer is no, I don’t want that change and I don’t think it would be good for the park, where nothing green exists any more. For this single park, don’t change the hours. If you’re going to change the hours, do all the parks. (There was a response that Google collects location data of people by the
park, not necessarily in the park, and so that time could indicate people returning home from shift work.)

Ben Krasny, Maury Ave. I’m not immediately around the dog park, but I’m within barking-distance. I’m a frequent visitor and love that it’s a resource in our community not for those only in the immediate vicinity, but also those that travel to get there. Policy and enforcement has been disconnected from my observation. Starting last spring there was targeted enforcement and would kick out everyone at sundown, but after sunset there would be people with dogs running. When the park is closed and locked, people are outside, and the dogs are inside running. What ideas do people have for enforcement of whatever rules we decide on?

Next speaker: I was on the original board and people have regularly ignored the rules, the signs at the gate. The closure when wet was to protect the grass. People come in as soon as it stops raining. They throw the dogs over and hop the fence. People will always go in, whatever the rules, whatever the hours. It’s a matter of if you have rules, either they are enforced or they are not. The $80 trespass fee has to be maintained because the park is an asset. People come from all over Hampton Roads because most cities don’t have a park. We have to manage it as an asset.

Dog Park Treasurer: Some city rules are not enforced because it’s unreasonable (the requirement to shovel snow within a certain amount of time, for example). That indicates it’s a problem to hard-and-fast apply those rules. There’s a reason why people are going to the dog park after dark. We should consider the itinerant community that lives around the dog park that might not be represented in a neighborhood league.

Next speaker: On just Baldwin Ave alone, there are 14 children. There are children around the dog park. The increased hours will mean more barking. How many of these kids will miss sleep and have distressed parents. Will kids get woken up in the morning?

Next speaker: I live across from the park, we have 3 children. I’ve been there 18 years. I don’t mind the dog park at all, so there’s obviously a threshold thing here. I don’t hear them barking early or late, but that’s not to say it doesn’t happen. I have a couple of pups, gave money to the dog park last year, but I don’t use it that much. I am concerned about the maintenance, the dust blowing. There might be value in closing it for things to grow back, for a not insignificant time – maybe a year. My experience is that it’s not disruptive. I know this is about hours, but I would propose looking at it differently – it looks terrible right now.

Next speaker: I go to this dog park every day. I choose this park for reasons. My time to go is 6-7 pm. this is the only lit, gated dog park in the area. The PETA park is not lit; there are dark, bushy areas that make me feel unsafe. This park is really important to me for that reason. The 7 am-7 pm compromise seems reasonable to me.

Vice President, GDPA: The Ghent Dog Park Association comes into the light when there’s a problem enforcing hours. Really, that’s not our role. Our role is beautification. We installed
Fibar® (engineered wood chips) to help with the grass. It is winter right now, so everything is dead. We want to close it soon to install sod if we can get funds. Unfortunately, we spend a lot of time on the defense about the hours and don’t have as much time to focus on beautification. We also have a letter in support of extending the hours from the Dog and Cat Hospital (she read it).

Secretary, GDPA: I adopted my dog in April, and the dog park was a life-saver. We got her from a puppy mill type of situation and she could not walk on a leash. The only place we could take her was the dog park and that was the reason I joined this board. We’re asking for a reasonable compromise.

Next speaker: I’m here in support of the dog park. This group does a good job with communication, but we need more. They have good signs at the park. Having local law enforcement come to every situation is a poor use of resources. Hopefully we can keep the conversation going and finding a common ground. The Association said they’ve gone to the houses nearby and reached out. I look forward to more communication.

Closing remarks from the President, GDPA: We’re giving up our hours, our money, to try to make this better. Unanimity in this matter would be great. Sometimes compromises need to be made. I am sorry that we can’t all agree. When we live in a city of a quarter of a million people, there are going to be things we don’t like.

Officer Perez polled attendees on a city-wide ordinance amendment for hours of 7 am to 7 pm year-round for dog-park operations. Would not apply to all parks, like Mowbray Arch, just dog parks. This is non-binding. Twenty-one were in favor.

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:58 pm**