Letter from the GNL President

Dear Neighbors,

There are several developments to report thanks to the dedication and hard work of members and board members of the GNL!

The inaugural issue of this newsletter (August 2020) received many positive responses. Our reinvigorated GNL Facebook page has also sprung back to life and we are sharing helpful and timely community updates throughout the week. Despite the pandemic, we have welcomed over 40 new members to the GNL since July. Our membership meetings have continued virtually through Zoom with good participation and interesting speakers. These have included the Chair of the Norfolk Public School Board, proponents and opponents of the downtown casino project, and an all-star lineup of speakers from the Commonwealth of Virginia and the City of Norfolk on flooding and resilience. An updated website has also been under development and will be released soon.

On the community improvement front, we organized a neighborhood clean-up project to pick up ground trash and trim overgrown shrubbery around Maury High School.

How should I factor COVID into my family’s holiday travel plans?

By Colin Findlay, MD

Holiday travel is likely to increase COVID-19 transmission throughout the United States. Although Hampton Roads has thus far done relatively well mitigating the spread of COVID, we will see cases imported from other portions of the country over the next two months.

The holiday season this year is aligned with a significant surge in cases, nationally, and severe surges in particular regions. Here are tips to make travel as safe as possible for both your family and our community.

The CDC’s guidance has been the gold standard throughout the pandemic, please consult their travel guidelines as you are planning your trip. You can access these by visiting https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html.

- Be transparent with the family you are going to visit. Do not travel if any family members are ill. Understand the risk profile that each group has adopted and develop mutual expectations before you go.

- Understand that there is significant asymptomatic transmission. We are probably most contagious in the 1-2 days before we become symptomatic. Just because no one is sick during your visit does not mean that you will not become infected during your trip.

- It is important to consider the asymptomatic infectious period when returning from travel. Please be conscientious about returning to our community. Consider staying at home for a couple days before returning to normal activities.

- Consider if your travel decisions will affect school attendance and work participation. Some organizations request a quarantine period of up to 14 days after travel to high risk States.

At this point, our success in minimizing the impact of COVID, and decreasing transmission, is due to efforts of everyone within the community. The longer this pandemic extends, the harder it becomes for all of us to remain vigilant in the choices we make. Please be extra careful throughout the holidays. We still have months to go before things will truly start to return to normal.
Letter from the President, cont'd

Based on strong GNL membership participation, and in partnership with the Ghent Business Association and neighboring civic leagues, we expanded the project area to include a larger area of Ghent and the commercial corridor. Over 80 volunteers participated and 600 lbs. of trash and trimmings were collected.

The GNL board was blown away by the community’s engagement and has already begun planning a tree planting project in November and a park clean-up for February 2021. Stay tuned – details will soon follow!

I invite you to participate with us during our monthly membership meetings (6:30 p.m. the 3rd Wednesday of each month through Zoom). Consider joining one of our various committees (Flooding, Community Improvement, Project Review, Communications) and contribute some of your time and skills.

As we head into what will be a “unique” holiday season, I encourage you to stay connected to the GNL for important community updates and urge you to stay or become engaged, and to stay safe!

I look forward to connecting with you at our next meeting.

Jeremy McGee
President, Ghent Neighborhood League
admin@ghentneighborhoodleague.org

Be Sure to Like, Follow & Share The GNL Facebook Page!
By JR Montalvo

The newly formed Ghent Neighborhood League Communications Committee is focused on maintaining the membership and keeping the community informed with timely news concerning the Ghent Neighborhood League, Ghent and the City of Norfolk. To that end, meaningful, unbiased, fact-based, good-to-know messages will be posted to the GNL Facebook page. Mr. Chris O’Brien, member of the Committee, will have principal posting responsibilities.

The GNL Board recently reviewed and approved the Facebook page “Posting Guidelines” which outline the key categories to be included. These are: Ghent Neighborhood League Membership Meeting Notices, Civic Life Reminders, Neighborhood News that contain positive and constructive perspectives.

We encourage all members to “like,” “follow,” and “share” the Facebook page. You can find us here:
This past summer the City of Norfolk / Department of Utilities rolled out the $3.4M Phase 3 of the Mowbray Arch Sewer and Water Improvement Project along Mill Street, Warren Crescent, and portions of Mowbray Arch and Pembroke Avenue. Phase 3 provides new sanitary sewer and water pipes, along with resurfaced streets after work is completed.

Some of the existing Ghent pipes are over a century old! This year-long initiative focuses on safely abandoning existing backyard sewer systems and installing new sewer and water pipes. These will connect with new street-side sewer systems and will assist with future access and enhance maintenance service for years to come.

The City and its contractor, Tidewater Utility Construction, Inc., will attempt to minimize disruption to residents during the project. Informative "door hangers" with project / contact information will be delivered to impacted residences in advance of the City's or contractor's need for property access. Though the construction will cause some unavoidable inconveniences, Ghent residents will enjoy these new and improved utilities for generations to come.

Questions or concerns on the project should be directed to Ms. Tiba Salim, City of Norfolk / Project Manager of the Mowbray Arch Sewer and Water Improvement Project @ 757-664-6864 or tiba.salim@norfolk.gov.

The Ghent Neighborhood League advocates for the conservation and promotion of the historic character of the Ghent neighborhood, working to facilitate communication between residents and foster a sense of community. A civic association for the area bound by the Hague, Colonial Avenue, south of 21st Street and Hampton Blvd. Membership is open to all property owners and renters living within this area.

Ghent Neighborhood League Leadership

Executive Officers
Jeremy McGee, President
Nat McCormick, First Vice President
JR Montalvo, Second Vice President
Larry Brett, Treasurer
Catherine Kilduff, Secretary

Board Members
George Kello
Jean Webster
Bob Kelly
Karen Reynes
Paige Rose
Julie Findlay
4Q 2020 Ghent Business Association Update
By Karen Reynes

The Ghent Business Association recently launched a new brand identity, redesigned logo, and redesigned website.

“The new brand identity better communicates what The Ghent Business Association and the vibrant community of Ghent, as a collective, stands for today,” said GBA Board Member Kaycee McCoy. “This modern yet timeless aesthetic reflects not only the meaningful community projects the GBA has been known for over the years, but the strength and unity we as a business community are thankful for in Ghent.”

The rebranding includes a top-to-bottom redesign of the organization's website (Ghentnorfolk.org), logo, graphics, communications, and correspondence. Visitors to the newly redesigned site (GhentNorfolk.org) will find information and resources not only for residents, but visitors and business owners alike. Users can browse event listings, subscribe to blog posts for community news and updates, purchase a GBA annual membership and more.

HOLIDAYS IN GHENT: The Ghent Business Association invites you to explore Ghent this holiday season and discover the unique specialty shops, restaurants, and professional services that make Ghent a great place to eat, shop, live, and play. Ghent shops and restaurants along the 21st Street and Colley Avenue business district will create festive, holiday window displays. Become enchanted with the spirit of the holidays with these merry designs, on display November 27 through January 1. Be sure to vote for your favorite window design, and when you vote, you will be entered to win a prize basket filled with goodies from Ghent businesses. Save-the-date for Ghent’s Open House Weekend, Friday, Saturday, & Sunday, December 4, 5, & 6. The weekend kicks off with the annual lighting of the Ghent Christmas tree. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, there will not be an actual ceremony or musical performances. But the tree will light the way to shopping and dining through the weekend and holiday season. Visit Ghent Businesses during Open House Weekend and take advantage of special promotions. We look forward to seeing you around the neighborhood and thank you in advance for supporting our businesses. Remember, shopping small independently owned businesses not only supports your friends and neighbors, but also the community. Best wishes for a happy holiday season!

LIVE, LOVE, AND RUN TACKY -- Tacky Sweater 5K Run and 5K Walk. As a sign of the times, this year’s race is a socially distanced run and walk with an open start and open finish. At registration, a participant can choose a start wave at 30 minutes intervals between 9 AM and 11 AM on December 5th. Individuals will be able to participate virtually anytime between December 4th and December 6th. All finishers will receive a custom finisher medal. All shirts and finisher medals will be mailed out following the race. Special prizes for top male and female Tacky Sweaters that will be judged based on photos posted to the race’s Facebook page on December 7th. Bring your registration confirmation to Smartmouth any time to receive your free beer.

For information on registration and the course, check out the following links.
#liveloveruntacky #mettleevents #ghentnorfolk
https://tackysweater5k.com/
https://raceroster.com/events/2020/35435/tacky-sweater-5k (registration link)
The Tacky Sweater 5K raises money in support of EVMS Melanoma Awareness.
Flood Mitigation in Ghent
By: Catherine Ware Kilduff

Here is a joke every Ghent resident should know: “Why do you have to act quickly during a flood? Answer: Because it is an emergent sea.”

You may have noticed October’s high tides that led to flooding along Mowbray Arch and interior Ghent streets. The community should again be ready for this occurrence November 14-18 due to the lunar calendar, water temperatures, and changing weather patterns of fall. These instances of “sunny day flooding” are predictable, but a nuisance. If a storm or strong winds amplifies these seasonal high tides, the flooding severity can be less predictable and more damaging.

WHAT WE CAN DO TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM

The Ghent Neighborhood League wants to address this issue with a multi-pronged approach. First, we are educating ourselves on the various approaches to prevent, mitigate and adapt to flooding. For example, at the September meeting, city and state experts on this issue discussed initiatives to address flooding, sea level rise, and climate change. Second, we want to collect feedback from Ghent residents and GNL members. At the October meeting we discussed whether Ghent needs signs warning of high waters to prevent people from driving through, or parking, in areas affected by flood waters. Third, we hope to come up with our own GNL plan to mitigate flooding.

The GNL needs to create a unique Flooding Plan to fulfill its mission. The plan will provide steps to accomplish goals in three categories: (1) Facilitating communication between members, residents, and regional partners, while collecting Ghent-specific perspectives and stories; (2) Identifying and prioritizing a menu of Ghent-specific flooding mitigation projects; and (3) Participating in regional, state and federal conversations to advocate for Norfolk communities.

COLLECTING PERSPECTIVES FROM GHENT RESIDENTS

Stories from Ghent will help decision-makers understand the problem of flooding. These include the gurgling stormwater drains, the blocked roads and swamped parking lots. Showing the impact of flooding in our area through stories, pictures and videos will crystallize the problem for those who do not live in Norfolk, especially our elected Commonwealth representatives in Richmond.

Several groups use storytelling for this purpose, and we will reach out to potential partners. Please let us know if you have suggestions about whom to speak with, or how to facilitate this conversation among our members, Ghent residents, and others.
PRIORITIZING GHENT FLOOD MITIGATION PROJECTS

Over the past ten years several reports have offered structural suggestions to mitigate the flooding in Ghent. For example, in 2019 the Army Corps of Engineers completed the Norfolk Coastal Storm Risk Management Study that recommended $1.4 billion of structural and non-structural mitigation projects to reduce the risk of coastal storm flooding. The City has started smaller projects, such as backflow preventers on storm drains, and the ongoing Brambleton Avenue wetland project. New ideas from Norfolk's Chesterfield/Ohio Creek project or other cities – like Washington DC's Tidal Basin Ideas Lab – may apply to the Hague. The GNL plan will identify a menu of mitigation ideas and solicit feedback from members and Ghent residents.

PARTICIPATING IN REGIONAL, STATE AND FEDERAL FLOOD MITIGATION CONVERSATIONS

Once we have collected Ghent stories and a menu of projects, the GNL will have materials ready for regional, state, or federal government engagement. As an example, at the end of October, the State of Virginia released a “Master Planning Framework” for sea level rise and flooding. This policy document is a precursor to development of the “Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan,” a detailed plan that will prioritize projects according to state guidelines and local and regional needs. It will drive state-administered flood preparedness and pre-disaster mitigation funding. The GNL’s goal is to ensure that Ghent members and residents stay informed and involved in the ongoing processes to ensure that project needs are properly funded.

Please contact the GNL President, Jeremy McGee at admin@ghentneighborhoodleague.org, or League Secretary, Catherine Kilduff, at Catherine.Kilduff@gmail.com with your suggestions and comments.

For more information, please see:
What are those bugs on my Crape Myrtle?

Bob Kelly, GNL Board Member

Have you noticed a lot of white “bumps” on the branches and in the crotches of your crepe myrtles or the crepe myrtles in the verge in front of your home? Or, have you noticed white “cotton like” bumps crawling on your trees? These are most likily crepe myrtle bark scale (CMBS) insects. Often the limbs and trunk of the tree also are covered by a black sooty mold, which is the result of the scale insects sucking the sap from your tree and the mold growing on the sugars contained in the tree sap. Crape myrtles suffer aesthetic damage and may eventually die because of these CBMS infestations. Even if CBMS do not kill the plants, there likely may be a reduction in plant vigor, number of flowers, and flower cluster size. Infested plants typically leaf out later than healthy plants.

CMBS is not native to the United States and was probably introduced from China around 2004. It has been spreading across the South and South East of the United States since then. Although it recently arrived in Norfolk, Steven Traylor, the City Arborist, recently noted that CMBS is extensively present throughout Norfolk. Although Norfolk City budgetary constraints prevent the city from having a plant health care (PHC) program to do remediating treatments, the Bureau of Parks and Urban Forestry does issue permits for PHC treatment work to be done at private cost of citizens if they are interested. A good discussion of CMBS and treatment options can be found in the Clemson Cooperative Information Center factsheet is located at https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/crapemyrtle-bark-scale/.

Chris Epes is the City of Norfolk’s Associate Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources. When talking to me about CMBS, Chris made the following points:

CMBS tends to extensively infest those crepe myrtles that are already under stress. The reason you frequently see them in high numbers on verge trees is because they have little pervious space around the roots and are subjected to higher than normal heat from the surrounding pavement. You may also see them in large quantities on trees that get topped or “crepe-murdered” annually, trees that are planted in too much shade, or trees that simply don’t get enough water wherever they may be located. So, for this reason, Chris always suggests to first attempt to use “cultural” controls to improve the health of the tree. Doing this successfully should result in a crepe myrtle that tolerates a small infestation, as most of the healthy trees in Norfolk do.
Crape Myrtle cont’d

Cultural controls include making sure that your tree is planted in a full-sun location, making sure the soil is moist, well-draining, not overly compacted and contains a reasonable amount of organic matter. It also means making sure the tree is getting watered periodically through the hot, dry parts of the summer. It means to prune the tree only to remove the dead branches and branches that are crossing and touching and never under any circumstance top or “crepe-murder” the tree. Desuckering would be an acceptable pruning measure for a crape myrtle, as sucker growth, especially profuse sucker growth, is fundamentally a stress response. It means that for some reason the tree is under duress. Might that be because of CMBS? Sure, but it could also because of other environmental factors. Identifying and fixing the problem/problems will be helpful in both reducing future suckering and future pest infestation.

VCE discourages use of chemical applications for this problem, although it is legal to do so in Virginia. The only effective chemical control involves using a concentrated neonicotinoid pesticide that must be mixed with water per the label instructions and poured over the root zone around the base of the tree. The tree will then absorb the insecticide via the roots and translocate it throughout the canopy. Given the lag between application and complete translocation, there may be a few weeks to a month before you begin to see much control, and that would be based on weather/rainfall which would dictate the degree to which the tree is translocating fluids. In addition, much of Norfolk is so close to the water table that the likelihood of contaminating the groundwater is high. Similarly, although there does not appear to be a consensus among researchers, neonicotinoid pesticides inside the flower parts and pollen may be harmful to pollinators that graze the flowers. Accordingly, most researchers tend to err on the side of caution and recommend that use of these chemicals be limited.

Chris also stressed, “If cultural controls are not effective, I recommend simply replacing the tree with something more suited to the space, otherwise you’ll be locked into either a perpetual infestation and the ultimate demise of the tree, or having to do chemical applications annually. This is going to be far more expensive, far more potentially dangerous to the applicator and far more potentially dangerous to the environment in the long run than simply replacing the tree with something that is ultimately healthy, happy and unfettered in the space.”

Finally, if you do decide to go the chemical treatment route, have an expert treat the tree for you. Don’t try to “do it on your own”, as misuse of the chemical treatment products can have a detrimental effect on you, your pets, and the environment. Do not forget to get a permit from the Bureau of Parks and Urban Forestry before spraying any city trees. A permit application can be downloaded from https://www.norfolk.gov/DocumentCenter/View/917/Tree-Street-Application?bidId= and can be submitted via email to the address treepermits@norfolk.gov. Check the box for “Spray/treat” and indicate “crepe myrtle bark scale” as the purpose for which the permit is requested.