

# *The Mountaineer*

Walnut Mountain Property Owners' Association

Volume 164

January 1, 2021

## **HELLO EVERYONE AND HAPPY NEW YEAR**

I hope you all had a restful and comforting Holiday Season. I know this past year has been difficult in many ways. I know the WMPOA Board has been working to make things better for the Mountain. As we move into 2021 we are doing more of the same.

Camera systems have been installed at the gates. We have added a worker at the Welcome Center for hours of 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Our off duty Sheriff Deputy stationed at the Welcome Center has been working out well. We know that this has been the slow time of the year for these items. It is still a good time to see if this is something we want to implement at some capacity moving forward. We understand there are two sides to this, those that welcome these changes and those that do not. Please know this, if we do not give them a try, then we will not know what will work and what is needed.

There will be generators purchased and installed for the water pumps. Being prepared is something that is always talked about on the Mountain. There are several generators on the Mountain for homes, so it makes sense that we do the same for the Mountain. We have funded a water program study that will let us know the state of our water system. We should be self-sufficient with individual water bills that would help us to pay for the upgrades to the system. Lately the WM staff has been doing more repairs to the systems. This is a sign that something needs to be looked at to see what we can do to be better prepared moving forward.

The rental situation on the Mountain is also being looked into. Understand we are trying to play catch-up with situations that have been allowed to go on. As with everything on the Mountain, there are always two sides to each situation. Being new to the Mountain, I have seen that just being helpful to someone that needs help has gone a long way in avoiding a potential problem. As a teacher I see every day that the lack of knowledge and understanding of something causes problems. A lack of helping others makes it worse. Our gates suffering a power surge will cause the gates to not work properly. Those with gate passes will not be able to get the gates to work. The gate can be reset by someone opening the gate from the inside like you would do when you leave. Those that come to the Mountain have a reason to be here. I have not encountered a situation yet where someone at the gate did not have a legitimate reason to be here. If you are renting out your house, please make sure your procedures for getting access to the Mountain are easy for your guest to understand. Please review your paperwork and see if any improvements can be made to make your guests' stay as relaxing as it can be for them, your neighbors and yourselves.

In conclusion, 2020 was rough year for us all in several different ways. Please do your part in making 2021 on Walnut Mountain the best it can be for yourself and others.

Clint Shaw, President

## FROM YOUR VICE PRESIDENT

It was a busy and innovative time for the new board developing a relationship and contract with The Gilmer County Sheriff to outpost deputies at our welcome station. We also acknowledge that our water system goes back to the early 1970s and we contracted for a water study to analyze and improve our system for the next decades.

We brought to fruition a safety camera system for our four gates. A credit to our former Board Vice President, Carol Callicut.

Our secretary has been highly successful in launching ZOOM to enhance the quantity and quality of our owner's participation in our monthly board meetings.

We are looking forward to the Finance Committee doing a comparative study of the salaries of our work force and the possibility of enhancing our benefits for the staff. We need to stay competitive.

Lastly, be safe, keep your social distance, and enjoy the many blessings we already have. A big THANKS to our Property Manager, Connie McVey and the staff for a job well done!!! HAPPY 2021  
Hector Rivera



## TREASURER / FINANCE COMMITTEE

There have been many changes in our community during the last few years. What follows are some financial highlights.

**Assessments** - increases occurred in 2005, 2007, 2016 and 2017. In 2016 the increase was for future repairs to the infrastructure. A letter regarding assessment increases for 2017 specifically mentioned "water delivery system is in need of upgrade."

**Reserves\*** - in 2016, we only had one reserve and it was earmarked for Operations. This was increased to two reserves in 2017 for Operations and Lake McClure. 2019 was my first budget as Treasurer and that was the year the finance committee recommended increasing our reserves to three accounts -- Operations, Improvements to the water system, and Repairs to lakes and dams. Those are the three reserves we have listed for the 2021 budget, as well.

**Roads** – For a few years prior to 2019, WM budgeted \$50,000 for roads. In 2019, the finance committee budgeted \$91,300 for road improvements. But later that year, the board voted to spend \$198,754 for roadwork. In 2020, the finance committee budgeted \$80,000 for WM's road system, but later the board increased that amount to \$113,000.

For 2021, the finance committee has reduced that number to \$59,000 because we anticipate a major overhaul of our water system and are not sure which roads will be torn up and need repair when the water system is upgraded.

**Water System** - In 2017, the board approved and budgeted \$30,000 for a water line pressure study. In the 2021 budget this pressure study has been renamed as an engineering study. *In our 2021 budgets for our water system we have allocated, \$20,000 for repairs, \$160,000 placed in capital reserves, \$30,000 for engineering study and \$40,000 for generators. In addition, \$70,000 was budgeted for water utilities.*

**Dams** – Walnut Mountain pays for a bi-annual dams report. Following the 2017 report, a video inside a Lake Yanu pipe was taken to make sure it was in good condition and the pipe was fine. In 2019, no issues were discovered, however, it was recommended that we continue building our reserves. This dam report has been budgeted for 2021.

Here are some challenges Walnut Mountain faced as well as some significant accomplishments for 2020. For the first time, Walnut Mountain was required to place money in four different banks to enable us to stay under the federally insured amounts (\$250,000) in each bank. During the 2019 year, I had negotiated much higher interest rates for our reserves. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 challenge, Walnut Mountain felt required to hire pool monitors. Also, the increase in visitors to the mountain required additional trash expenditures. The Board also voted to increase the amount spent on road repairs. Walnut Mountain replaced a deteriorating swing set, repaired Gate 1's bridge, drained and dredged the Turniptown Road pond, and for November and December we added a monitor for evening hours at the Welcome Center.

As the end of my Treasurer term approaches, I make the following suggestions to the Board for Walnut Mountain's future. To aid in future transitions from Board to Board, I recommend we create a binder that lists the detailed activities and responsibilities for each officer. These responsibilities are listed in the Bylaws; however, the descriptions are not detailed and do not reflect advancements in the way duties are performed. For the following reasons, motions that were put to a vote and issues examined over the past five years should be made available to new members in the form of a packet. Walnut Mountain's lawyers have charged us for answering the same questions being asked by different boards. Well thought out projects, designed to solve problems, have been dropped because a future Board had no idea what a previous Board had researched and/or accomplished. I believe these suggestions will enable a smoother transition and reduce duplicate efforts.

We have been wise to establish healthy reserves. Over the last couple of years we have made improvements to our roads, club house, pool entry system and many other areas. Now, we are ready to improve our water system.

Frank Randall MBA, Treasurer

\*A reserve is a pool of money set aside for a specific purpose and not to be used for anything else.

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## COMMUNICATION MOVING FORWARD

The ongoing goal, on behalf of the WMPOA board, is to increase communication on as many levels as possible, with ultimate transparency. There are five ways the board is collectively communicating:

1. The Mountaineer
2. ZOOM Meetings
3. The POA Bulletin Board and Emails
4. The Minutes on the Web Site
5. Text Blast Software

The Mountaineer is issued quarterly. As the Mountain's Newsletter. You can receive it physically in the mail or via email. Contact Shyla Brenan at [ellijaygirls@aol.com](mailto:ellijaygirls@aol.com), if you wish to receive it electronically. It is the snapshot of the entire community. In addition to officers' reports, various clubs, and seasonal activities, community interest articles are also welcome.

ZOOM Meetings have allowed us to expand the number of people who can attend board meetings in light of the pandemic. Guidelines for GA still limit the total "group gathering" capacity to 40. Attending the meetings remotely has proven to be a great option. The drawback is I am currently hosting the meetings from my laptop. Therefore, the audio and camera are limited to just a few individuals. This is why I sit in front of the President, Vice President, and Treasurer so that our remote participants can see and hear a few individuals. The next step in expanding our ZOOM capabilities, will be a ZOOM ROOM! This is a little more involved but will utilize camera equipment that will capture the entire room. Currently, we are asking board members and live audience participants, to say their name, speak into a microphone, and ask their

question or make a comment. A ZOOM ROOM will allow remote viewers to “put a face with a name” and get a feel for the entire meeting area, not just a few select board members sitting behind my laptop.

***Remote attendees have expressed some frustration in not being able to ask questions during the meeting. Unfortunately, this is an expansion that we will not be able to offer, even with a ZOOM ROOM. We are asking that if you attend remotely, that you keep your audio muted, to control unnecessary background noise, and that you direct questions via chat to our board member Stephanie Kolenut-Valdez. She will then ask the question on your behalf or answer you in chat.***

The POA Bulletin Board and emails, prior to ZOOM, were the principal communication outlets for the community. I will be labeling the POA Bulletin Board (the one on the left) at the mail kiosk, and will post key emails, announcements, etc. from our office staff and WMPOA President. We currently have an email list which is how we send out ZOOM invites and alerts of 350+. With 600+ property owners, we are probably reaching about 55% of the community via email.

The Minutes are posted on the Walnut Mountain web site, a month in arrears. They must be approved by the board before posting. I have streamlined the process for posting them, so they are shared in a timely manner. However, our board meetings have been long as we “catch up” from no meetings in March, April and May due to the pandemic. If you are unable to attend a POA meeting directly or remotely, there is enough detail in the minutes to glean the initiatives and direction of the WMPOA board on behalf of the community.

Another consideration is **Text Blasting**. As this article details, approximately 55% of the community gets emails. While cell phone service on the mountain can be limited depending on the provider, one thing is certain.... smart phones are here to stay. One of the main uses for this software and system would be alerts. In November, when hurricane ZETA challenged most of us, with 38 hours of no

electricity, communication was limited to emails, and only if you could pick them up on your cell phone. The internet came crashing down with the three power poles that broke in half. We will be examining **Text Blasting** in the January meeting.

Please know you can opt out if you do not wish to receive them. They will also be used very judiciously for mostly alerts and major announcements.

Moving into 2021, help us help you. I personally appreciate all the feedback from individuals, on the ZOOM meetings. The immediate plan was to open communication between the board and the residents. It has had (in my opinion) a wonderful side effect. Neighbors are talking to neighbors. Neighbors are supporting the board via committees, meeting participation, or volunteering to serve. We had an unprecedented FIVE bios submitted to fill a vacated board position. As one person emailed me after the first ZOOM meeting “I have lived on WM for almost 30 years, and never met many of the people attending the meeting”. Music to my ears.


Wishing you all, a healthy, happy and prosperous NEW YEAR! Rhonda Yabrow – Secretary

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## FROM YOUR PROPERTY MANAGER

As I reflect on the year 2020, all I can say is, WOW! This year has certainly presented its share of challenges. Early after the new year began, we were faced with the Covid-19 pandemic and were forced to reevaluate many aspects of our day to day lives on personal as well as professional levels. The Walnut Mountain staff, and I adapted as necessary and were able to move forward with operating the business of WM and working to complete planned goals. Members of the Walnut Mountain Staff are: Rick Beavers, Micah McElroy, Brandy Davenport, Ken Johnson, Jim Waddell and I, Connie McVey. I cannot express how grateful I am for this wonderful group of people that I am blessed to call co-workers and friends.

As we are approaching the end of this year, I would like to highlight the projects that were completed during 2020:

- We installed and started-up redundant pumps at both water pumping stations.
- The pond at the entrance of WM was drained, silt removed, enlarged, a new drainpipe installed, and a new overflow outlet was created.
- The bridge located at gate 1 was repaired with an epoxy overlay, which extended the life of the bridge for 25-30 years.
- The paving project this year repaired approximately 51,339' square feet of WM roads.
- Added security detail, provided by Gilmer County Sheriff's Office for the community on a 60-day pilot study to help with issues at the gates and throughout the community that may occur after hours.
- We installed cameras at all four gates that consist of a high-definition digital video recorder and three 2.1 mp high-definition IR bullet cameras to add a layer of protection against gate damage.

- The staff worked diligently to maintain the grounds (mowing, weed eating, blowing leaves, keeping roads clear, brush piles chipped, built new swing for playground at tennis courts, etc.) in the effort to keep the grounds pristine for the homeowners and guests of Walnut Mountain.
- To date, the staff and I have received and completed 147 work orders from homeowners. Please, if you notice something around the mountain that needs to be addressed, come by the Admin Office, and fill out a work order, and I will have the staff address the issue(s) accordingly.

As we look forward to 2021, we have been working diligently to develop our project plans for the upcoming year. Following are a list of some of the things that will be addressed:

- Obtaining a Preliminary Engineering Report for the WM water system will help us prioritize the areas in the water system that need to be addressed by importance.
- Installation of generators for both pump stations will help keep the community's water system in operation during power outages.
- Update our SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition) system will allow us to monitor our water system around the clock with Guard Dog technology. This means our water system will have "eyes" on it 24/7.
- And, of course, we are gearing up and ready to provide the highest level of customer service to you all, our homeowners, in this upcoming year.

The staff and I would like to wish everyone a happy New Year!

Connie McVey

## Architectural Control Committee (ACC)

It has been a very busy year on the mountain, lots of renovations, repairs and updating going on. It is nice to see everyone taking such pride and joy in their own special piece of the mountain. Since we have many newcomers to the mountain as well as changes to Gilmer County permitting I would like to focus this article on the permitting requirements. Being prepared helps with the permitting process as well as the required ACC approval process.

- New decks require a building permit
- Changes to structure of existing decks requires a permit. Replacement of deck boards does not need a permit.
- Retaining walls exceeding four feet require a permit, a land disturbance permit, as well as engineering plans
- New driveways need a building permit and land disturbance permit
- Any grading now requires a land disturbance permit
- Sheds with a foundation or over 200 sq ft or with electric need a building permit

Links to Gilmer County Permits:

<https://gilmercounty-ga.gov/forms/planningcommission/Steps%20To%20Obtain%20A%20Building%20Permit.pdf>

<https://gilmercounty-ga.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/LandDisturbingApplication.pdf>

<https://gilmercounty-ga.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Application-BuildingPermit.pdf>

<https://gilmercounty-ga.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Application-DrivewayPermit.pdf>

In closing I would like to thank the all the members of the committee for their work this year. Their

commitment and dedication is greatly appreciated. Special thanks to Brandy for her support.

Your ACC Committee members wish you a Happy New Year: Brad Michels, Steve Young, Pat Buono, Jerry Robey and Mary Scott, Chairman.

*IN MEMORIAM*


*LISA MCGEE*

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## FESTIVAL OF TREES

Every year the Gilmer County Library invites community groups to decorate a tree for their Festival of Trees. Although this year the usual opening night did not happen, the choirs and the cookies, the trees were still there. And our GARDEN CLUB tree was gorgeous! Our thanks go out to Bill Hardage, Suzanne McGee, (President of the Garden Club), Sara Sevin and Jan Young who set up and decorated our tree. Sara and Jan were the artists of the group and it showed. Here it is:





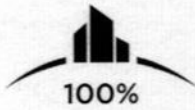
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