

FINAL REPORT
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

26 MAY 2009

Background. In September 2008, the Board of Directors created the Communications Committee as an ad hoc committee and commissioned it to investigate ways to improve communications between the community (members) and the Board of Directors/NECA administrative staff. To carry out this broad mandate, the committee addressed (1) the *Newtown Reporter*, (2) the NECA web site and (3) members' comments and concerns expressed via correspondence, email, and the suggestion box.

Summary. To be effective, each of the above (*Reporter*, web site, and general correspondence) must be the responsibility of a paid staff member under the supervision of the General Manager and the overall purview of one or more of the directors. During our tenure, we placed a request for feedback in the *Reporter* regarding what homeowners would like to see in the bi-monthly *Newtown Reporter* and/or on the NECA website. We received zero response. Perhaps this demonstrates general apathy, or perhaps homeowners are satisfied with the changes we have already implemented. On a more positive note, some Association members have taken pains to express their appreciation for the improvements they have noticed in the *Reporter* and on the web site. Regardless of the lack of general community feedback, the responsible employees must maintain enthusiasm for their tasks, and if no guidance is forthcoming from the community, will have to rely on input either generated or fostered by the NECA administrative staff, committee chairs, or the Board of Directors. No single person can publish the *Reporter*, maintain the web site, or insure action on comments and concerns. Such tasks are best accomplished by team effort, and if the Board, Committees, and General Manager do not provide active and ongoing support, these channels of communication will fall into disuse and be of no service to the community.

Newtown Reporter. The newsletter is published on a bi-monthly basis by R.E.D. Media, which provides the same service to a multitude of community associations at no cost. R.E.D. Media receives income by selling ads which appear in the publication. NECA pays OBUN Hawaii to mail the *Reporter*, which is addressed to "Resident" and delivered to all homes in Newtown Estates. In the past, the Executive Director, who had difficulty finding suitable material, edited this newsletter. As a result, much of the *Reporter* consisted of items regarding NECA rules, and many articles were repeated in every issue. If insufficient material was delivered to R.E.D. Media, they added filler material from other associations and/or various sources. The resultant newsletter was of little interest to the NECA homeowners and, at best, scanned and discarded. To be viable, someone having an interest in the quality and community relevance of this newsletter must be given the responsibility for its publication. Further, all persons associated with the administration of NECA should assist the editor in developing material for publication.

Recommendations:

1. Assign responsibility for this publication to a paid staff member.
2. Retain an eight-page format.
3. Use a different cover page layout for each issue.
4. Commission all Board Members, Committee Chairs, and administrative staff to assist in providing material for each issue. Encourage them to seek out neighbors or members who can contribute articles of interest to the community.
5. The following material should be included in each issue:
 - a. President's Message
 - b. General Manager's Report
 - c. Classes and Activities
 - d. Board Actions (brief)
 - e. Committee Reports (brief, and only from committees who have meetings or actions to report)

- f. Special Events
- g. Boy Scout News; other club news if available
- h. Meeting schedules
- i. Messages from Legislators if available
- j. Hours of Operation; NECA contact information

NECA Web Site. When the committee addressed the Web Site, it was dormant and had been down for quite awhile. A lot of effort and initiative on the part of NECA is required to bring the site up and running and make it interesting and useful to members. Similar to the *Newtown Reporter*, a paid staff member must be designated Webmaster. He/she should not be expected to produce all content for the site, except for posting routine reports and information, but should be tasked to post items presented by the Board of Directors, Committee Chairs, and staff. Central to this requirement is an active bulletin board and current FAQs which would entice homeowners to visit the site often.

The NECA web site should consist of the following pages:

1. Home Page
2. Bulletin Board
3. About Us
4. Board and Community News
5. Activities and Events
6. FAQ
7. Rules and Guidelines
8. Forms

Suggestions, email, and other correspondence. When the committee investigated this issue, no procedures were in place to ensure that homeowners' comments and concerns were adequately addressed in a reasonable timeframe. Again, the handling of this material should be the responsibility of a paid staff member (not the General Manager) who receives these inputs, logs receipt, distributes them to the proper administrative member or director, and records when the comment or concern was answered and by whom.

Recommendations:

1. The suggestion box and revised forms should be made available in or around the front desk.
2. The suggestion box should be emptied every working day.
3. Emails addressed to the NECA (newtownstates@hawaii.rr.com) mailbox should go to a designated staff member rather than the General Manager.
4. Incoming mail not addressed to an individual should be received, opened, and routed by a designated staff member to the appropriate employee or director.
5. A procedure needs be in place whereby suggestions, email, and other correspondence are tracked from receipt to response when a response is indicated.

Email List The Committee recommends that NECA establish a group email address to provide the ability to instantaneously reach those homeowners who have expressed an interest in receiving information affecting the NECA community. Such information could address criminal activity, special meetings, reminders of programs being offered at the recreation center, outages of services, motions and/or recommendations under consideration by the BOD, etc. Much of this information would be posted on the NECA web site, but those who choose would receive the information directly. The *Newtown Reporter* will explain this new service and request that those interested submit their email addresses to the association for inclusion in the group address. A suggestion was made to include a request for email addresses in the mailing of the proxy forms for the annual election. A short statement could be placed at the bottom of the form explaining the new email list and providing a blank line for the homeowner's email address.

NOTE: Photos of individuals engaged in NECA activities and/or using the facilities for recreation, meetings or parties are extremely useful in drawing interest in the newsletter and web site. These photos contain images of both adults and children. NECA must obtain a legal opinion regarding which of these photos may be used without, or only with, the individual's consent. How can we maximize the use of photos without treading on individual rights or endangering the safety of children?

The committee is pleased to note that many of our past recommendations have been implemented and many others are in the process of implementation. Hopefully, the enthusiasm for improving communications will not wane over time.