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Homeowners forming advisory group

Calvin Bratt
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Some participants in the larger discussion earlier stay on to talk further after Monday's Homestead homeowners meeting at Steakhouse 9 restaurant. (Calvin Bratt/Lynden Tribune)

Residents in Homestead start to take next steps

LYNDEN — A second meeting of Homestead homeowners Monday forged some progress toward getting organized and gaining voting rights in the residents' dispute with managers and owner over hiked fees for common area maintenance.

About 100 people turned out, and the atmosphere was less combative than when 300-plus gathered Dec. 30 to verbally blast the Homestead Farms Golf Club jump in “joint maintenance fees” from \$36 per month to \$93 for 2020.

Those on Monday took first steps toward forming an advisory committee.

Starting the meeting, manager Mick O’Bryan said the purpose was to form this committee, as he had asked earlier, that can advocate as a voice for homeowners on priorities and possible changes in the operation of Homestead.

O’Bryan introduced J. Miller, who said he is a law enforcement “fact finder” by profession. Miller then largely led the group’s discussion from then on to, as he put it, try to “manage the anger (of the Dec. 30 meeting) into positive action.”

Miller said the advisory group needs to be set up as quickly as possible, and it should draft an amendment to the Homestead Farms 1992 founding document “to get voting rights” for the 600-plus homeowners who pay the monthly fees. Also, dues should be set “low enough” to be acceptable to a majority.

Miller spoke of starting a “legal fund” that is transparent to all residents, and he invited contributions to it. The homeowners will incur costs in retaining an attorney who can review and back up their requested changes, someone who can “say it is in our best interests,” he said.

Miller said he can be reached via the email address homestead.money@yahoo.com.

In the course of audience back-and-forth, two people who are residents of Homestead offered themselves as possible resources or references to others of expertise. One was attorney David Andersson, who has connections in both Whatcom County and Canada. The other was a real estate professional who said that “compromise” is always needed in real estate and related deals.

Andersson said that a new Washington State law in 2018 significantly changes how community associations operate and supersedes the legal set-up of Homestead Northwest Inc. in 1992. He said the Lynden effort should find out whether it can assert “voting rights” upon the owner of the golf course and more than 30 acres of common areas.

At Monday's one-hour meeting, O'Bryan said that 18 Paradise LLP – listed in county records as owner of dozens of properties of the Homestead golf and residential community – is actually an investment group represented by Morris Chen of Richmond, British Columbia, and Chen is not the sole owner.

By consensus, approximately 15 members was agreed upon as the size of an advisory committee.

Miller called out specific neighborhoods or homeowner associations within Homestead – essentially all residential property surrounding the golf course between Benson and Bender roads – and took down the name of a potential member from each to be on the advocacy board.

He said he will be in contact with the smaller working group on next steps.

Some asked, should they begin paying the new \$96 monthly fee? Replying from the audience, Andersson said, "If you want to get somebody's attention, don't pay them any money."

O'Bryan said anyone who doesn't pay the new fee amount will get notice at six, 12 and 18 months that they are in arrears. Not paying amounts to not being an active participant in the forward direction of the community as well, he said.

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