

We're building capacity for change and impact.

Building on the work of the past leadership, the board of the Overbrook Farms Club (OFC) seeks to undertake a number of initiatives to improve OFC's capacity to serve our community. We need your input, and offer the following summary in the hopes that you will join us for the Fall Meeting on November 6, at 7 pm in the Wistar Morris Room at the Overbrook Presbyterian Church, to hear more from the board and to provide your input.

This past June, with the election of new board leadership, we completed some internal capacity assessment and held a planning retreat on September 23. The resulting in the assessment, broadly summarized below, as well as a series of recommendations that the board has approved and will be implementing this fall.

Strengths: The strengths identified for Overbrook Farms included its rich history and current diversity of residents, its proximity to natural resources, such as Morris Park, and the city center and western suburbs. Our sense of community cohesion and spirit, as well as political relationships and the strength of local religious institutions also figured prominently.

Weaknesses: Lack of consistent engagement of and communication with the full community figured prominently in the conversation, in addition to the need for much improved public safety and security, a more concerted development strategy for the 63rd Street commercial corridor, and need for more oversight of developers and non-local property owners. Finally, the unresolved matter of the local historic district nomination was also mentioned.

Opportunities: Philadelphia's continued upward trend in new resident influx, property values, and new development is an opportunity for our neighborhood, as these forces are only starting to impact Overbrook Farms. We seem to be experiencing more interest from younger generations of home seekers desiring historic, single-family residences inside the city. With similar historic neighborhoods in the Northwest, such as Mt. Airy and Germantown, already well on the rise, focus seems to be shifting to Overbrook Farms as one of the next frontiers for new investment. If we can engage our faith-based institutions, our community, and interested developers, we will be better able to manage growth and new investment strategically and ensure that the interests of both new and long-standing stakeholders are well served. Beyond our own interests, we also need to be more engaged partners with our neighboring community organizations, especially if we are to improve educational opportunities for children and overall public safety--these are not problems we can fix in isolation.

As a result of the assessment, the board has created the following two areas of proposed action for this coming year.

(1) Increase the capacity of the Overbrook Farms Club (OFC) to perform its mission of service to our community.

Limited volunteer time and financial resources has been a challenge for the OFC in recent years. So, we The Board have identified some immediate ways in which to improve efficiency, maximize the volunteer time we our community appears to have, and develop our OFC's financial assets.

- *(a) Apply for 501(c)(3) status for the Overbrook Farms Club, so that we can more actively raise funds, and wind up the Overbrook Farms Civic Foundation, which has recently lost its tax-exempt status.*

To date, there have been two entities serving our community, the OFC and the Foundation. It is hard enough managing one non-profit, let alone two, and only one is needed to advance our mission. The Foundation board, led by Stephanie Kindt has already moved to wind up its operations and transfer remaining cash assets to the OFC. We will be applying as the OFC to the IRS for Federal 501(c)(3) status, which will provide us greater ability to leverage funding and contributions to support our mission.

- *(b) Simplify our the OFC board committee structure and afford committees more time to do their work, empower them to make decisions, and allow for better communications between our constituents and the committees.*

To date, we've had a "kitchen cabinet" committee structure of 13 largely one-person committees, which we are proposing to consolidate to 6 standing committees of three to four members each. The OFC board will shift from its monthly meeting schedule to bi-monthly, allowing for the committees to meet and accomplish their work in the intervening months. Reports to the board and the community from the committees will be sent regularly, and each committee will have a dedicated gmail address to allow for clearer and more concerted communications tracking and management.

1. **Executive Committee** | OFC-Executive@gmail.com | This committee is made up of the officers of the board, but does not make decisions on behalf of the board. This committee could be merged with Governance & Nomination, if desired, though most board structures acknowledge the officers as the board leadership team unto itself that on occasion may need to meet on its own, though I don't think this group needs a dedicated public email, as are proposed for the below committees.
2. **Governance & Nomination** | OFC-Governance@gmail.com | This committee would be responsible for creating and maintaining bylaws, key policies, and leads the annual nomination process and committee member appointments.
3. **Membership & Finance** | OFC-Finance@gmail.com | This committee is responsible for annual membership fundraising, as well as the budget and financial management of the OFC. This committee would include the current membership and treasurer roles, and since community-based revenues (see

business models below) may be a driver of revenue, it makes sense to combine membership and finance matters.

4. **Marketing & Communications** | OFC-Marketing@gmail.com | This committee would be responsible for all manner of communications with the community and marketing of OF to the region at large. This committee would subsume the current listserv/website, marketing, welcoming committee, and newsletter committee functions.
 5. **Programs & Public Safety** | OFC-Programs@gmail.com | This committee would comprise all programs and services that are not property or real-estate based. These would include (from the current committee list) farmer's market, House Tour, children's events (Santa Claus, Easter Egg Hunt, etc.), as well as any town watch or other public safety programs. Finally, if OFC gets more involved in developing our relationship with our local schools and improving the education offerings for our community, this work would fall to this committee.
 6. **Property & Civic Space** | OFC-Property@gmail.com | Finally, all matters related to public space, zoning, licensing, and historic preservation, including traffic and parking matters, and beautification, as it pertains to public space, would fall to this committee.
- *(c) Shift from a member-governed model for OFC to a self-nominating approach to governance.*

Historically, OFC has been “member governed”, which means that members in good standing vote for new directors. Only thirty members out of nearly 400 households are required to elect board members, which means that in most cases a distinct minority of members are determining the board. We propose to shift to a more conventional, self-nominating approach to board development, in which the Governance & Nominating Committee publicly solicits nominees from the community, interviews candidates, and makes recommendations to the board, which then elects the proposed members. The latter is the predominant approach to nonprofit governance. The historical argument for member governance is one of representation. But when only thirty or 400 (potential) members are required, representation may be happening in letter, but not in spirit. We feel there are other ways to engage the community and represent its interests more authentically than the member governance structure. (See below.)

(2) Improve our relationship and communications with the community through more effective communications and outreach, and implementing at least two actionable initiatives for fiscal 2017/18.

- *(a) Improve basic communications and active community participation and input.*

In recent years, we have noted some diminished participation in membership in the OFC within our community. This may stem from perceived lack of value in membership in OFC relative to concerns or priorities for the neighborhood. As a volunteer organization, the OFC has limited financial and labor capacity. To bring the expectations of the community better in line with the capacities of OFC, we need to:

- Complete work that has begun on ensuring our data for Overbrook Farms residents is current and complete: Names, USPS addresses, email addresses, and preferred mode of contact.
- Communicate why people should provide their information and preferences; what is the value for the community member, and how is their data going to be used?
- Communicate how we intend to use our modes of communication to improve efficiency and effectiveness of communications: website, email, newsletter (electronic and print), and listserve.

Our goals in this initiative are to...

- Gather input on your top priority needs and desires on an annual basis, so that the OFC can focus fundraising and implementation efforts based on community consensus.
- Improve notification, awareness, and ongoing education concerning crime and public safety issues as they arise, so that we may collectively make our community safer.
- Customize and target our communication channels for the neighborhood, so that you can get the information you need, when you need it, and in the way(s) that you prefer.
- Reduce the communication burden on the listserve and moderate the conversation there to avoid run-away conversations that clog your inbox.

Over this coming year we will be renovating the OFC website, so that conversations about events of community interest and the preferred contractor list (two conversations that currently occupy the listserv) can be located there and more readily updated. We are also interested in your preferences about receiving the monthly newsletter: hard copy or email? In the end we wish to use our communication channels accordingly:

- Website: Information on the community and its history, contractor/vendor recommendations, events calendar, sales/and giveaways, public safety, meetings, etc.

- Newsletter: Monthly digest of public interest information and notices of upcoming events and meetings.
- Listserv: Notices and queries of an urgent time-value only, such as public safety notifications and final reminders for key events and happenings.
- *(b) Actively engage the community in prioritizing broad areas of need, and select at least two feasible, actionable projects for 2017/18.*

At the September retreat, the board identified the following broad areas of needs and opportunity for Overbrook Farms. At and following the November community meeting, we will be gathering your input on the prioritization of the below, as well as ideas for projects for this year that fit under each broad category.

- Implementing More Neighborhood Beautification
- Improving Public Safety
- Developing the 63rd Street Commercial Corridor
- Improving Educational and School Options
- Resolving Historic Designation and Developing Preservation Resources
- Other Areas of Need?

We will identify two or more projects in the top two prioritized categories for this year based on your feedback, develop an implementation plan and budget for them, and then undertake a community-wide fundraising campaign to cover costs that we cannot secure through volunteer or in-kind contributions. Our goal will be to complete these projects by June 2018. These projects will be completed in addition to our ongoing work on the above initiatives, zoning and licensing oversight, and general community stewardship.