



Safeguarding Your Home

A home break in is one of the more invasive experiences you can have as an adult. Not only are break-in's costly, but there is a high level of personal violation that comes with knowing that strangers have been in your most private place, your home. After many years in a rough neighborhood on the south-side of Atlanta, I have survived 7 break-in's, some worse than others. Unfortunately, the most important thing I have learned through these experiences is that you cannot stop a thief, you can only discourage them. Below are a few tips that will hopefully help discourage any potential break-in's in our community.

Alarm systems are the go-to home defense strategy for most homeowners but in reality the alarm only sounds once the break-in has occurred. The better defense is actually in the advertising. Since we are fortunate enough to have good police response times here in West Highlands, the thieves know that once the alarm sounds they have limited time to get in, out and away. In this regard, well advertised security or video surveillance systems do serve as a deterrent to potential thieves. Most thieves enter at the rear of the home where they are more likely to be obscured, so make sure to put security signage at all entry doors, not just the front door. Most burglars don't want to enter a home where people are present, but some simply don't care so make sure to have your alarm even when you are at home. This is simply an added precaution in the event that you cannot get to the phone in an emergency. Lastly, make sure the siren points outside your house so that if you do have an emergency it is easy to identify your house.

Make sure your doorbell works. If your bell rings when you are not expecting it, yell out "I'll get it" to make sure whoever is on the other side believes there are multiple people at home, even if there are not. If you do not know the person, don't be afraid to talk to them through the door to see who they are and what they want. As soon as you open your door, the person on the other side immediately has access to a slew of useful information – what type of locks/security you have on your door, how big that barking dog of yours actually is, what you look like and how trusting you are, and what type of stuff you have in your house. Don't feel that strangers should be given this information freely just so that you won't appear rude.

Be careful what you throw away. When you put your trash cans out the night before collection day understand that there are a full 12 hours for people to pick through your boxes and papers to see what you have that they'd like to take. When you buy new electronics, take the boxes to the dumpster at your office instead of putting them outside your home. Invest in a shredder as well, though be sure to hide it in a cabinet away from your files. I once had thieves use my shredder to destroy all of my nicely filed serial numbers so that my stolen electronics couldn't be tracked.

Remember that if it's easy and logical for you, it's a no-brainer for the thieves. Most people keep their "important things" in their master bedroom where it will be closest to them, and therefore safest, right? That's why the master bedroom is the #1 target for thieves. The kitchen is typically the last place they look since there are simply so many places for you to hide something in the kitchen. Most of us hide things so that they are easy to remember. Unfortunately, this also makes them easy to guess. Take time to determine if your hiding strategies are too obvious and if so, change them up.

There are a million ways to make your house less appealing for a thief. Ultimately, however, the best way to fortify your house is in fortifying your relationship with your community. Talk to your neighbors and watch out for each other. If you see people you don't know or someone acting suspiciously, say hello. Oftentimes, simply acknowledging a suspicious person will halt whatever they were about to do because you have made them aware that they have been seen. And for a criminal, being identified is just as bad as being caught.

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Securing Your Bushes

What surrounds your house is just as important for securing your house as the locks on the doors. In an urban setting where houses are fairly close together, we tend to want to use our plants as privacy screens, which is certainly a friendlier approach than building fences or walls. Sometimes, however, those plants can become so dense that they are as opaque as walls, making it easy for criminals to use them for cover. In developing a home security plan for your house, remember that your landscape should benefit you, not work against you.

Trees epitomize the classic American neighborhoods painted by Norman Rockwell by providing fruit, shade and entertainment for restless kids. We love our trees, most of which are still small in our new community, but as they grow we need to remember that for all the good the trees provide, they can also become a hazard if not tended properly. Low hanging tree branches can block sidewalks and views to the entry points to your house. Tree branches within 6-7 feet of your house can also serve as ladders to second story windows. Ensuring that branches that could become potential hazards are trimmed provides a safer landscape for you as well as nicer street-scape for your neighbors.

Bushes make great screening materials for such things as foundation walls, gas meters and AC compressors, but if allowed to grow unchecked, they can provide hiding places for thieves. Police typically recommend keeping bushes trimmed year round to a height of about 3 feet so that they cannot obscure windows or provide enough coverage for someone to hide. You may also want to consider using ground cover plants in lieu of bushes in front of any low basement or first floor windows. If you prefer bushes that offer great security but require less trimming, try planting thorny bushes such as Hawthorne or rose shrubs. Blackberry vine is another thorny option that does great along fences. An added deterrent under windows is the use of gravel instead of wood mulch as the gravel will provide audible warning of someone's presence.

When looking for new plants for your yard, make sure to verify the mature plant size noted on the plants' label. Since plants grow at different rates, you can use this information to help you determine where the plant should go in your landscape, as well as what it can be grouped with. For example, planting cypress trees next to your porch may look great when the trees are 4' high, but when they reach 15' in a couple of years, it can make your porch a cavern and a great place for thieves to hide. Instead, try locating plants with a taller mature height further from your house and group with plants of varying mature heights to create interest without creating a wall.

As we make efforts to safeguard our community, take the time to consider safety from the outside into your own home. Stand at the street and look at your house to see what simple changes you can make with minimal impact on your budget. Sometimes it just takes removing an overgrown bush and replacing it with a decorative protective shrub to make a big impact.



WEST HIGHLANDS HOA MEETING MINUTES

I. Call to Order for West Highlands Home Owners Association meeting for Sept. 29, 2012

II. Developer Report – Steve Brock, Brock Built

- a. Houses selling at a rate of about 3/month with modest increases in prices
- b. 57 lots between Habershal and Johnson are pending transfer between AHA and Brock Built; construction should start very soon
- c. Additional 402 lots to be built behind Perry Park; construction agreement between AHA and Brock is nearly complete on 1st 130 houses and will allow infrastructure to be put in
- d. 3 acres of reserved land near Perry park are reserved for permanent amenities; planning of amenities is beginning
- e. Special assessment will be required to raise HOA fees in support of new amenities
- f. Narrowing of Habershal to create traffic islands and curbside parking is anticipated in the area near Rockdale Park entrance

III. Atlanta Housing Authority Update – Debra Stephens

- a. Update on PATH connector – new extension to double size of PATH walkway in WH
- b. Spur connector piece to be considered to connect PATH to Proctor Creek/Rockdale Park
- c. PATH trail will connect WH to Silver Comet Trail
- d. Perry-Bolton TAD update: TAD has been referred to the Supreme Court, but is not yet scheduled on the docket

IV. Safety & Security Committee Updates

- a. Committee Report - Robbie Burr
- b. Introduction to ProTect Security
 - i. ProTect now provides security for HOA as well as the apartments; anticipated increase in efficiency and communications
 - ii. Start Oct. 1st
 - iii Mr. Newsom can be contacted with any managerial issues at gnewsom@protectsecurityllc.com
 - iv. Officers will be uniformed, but un-armed

V. Grounds Committee Updates

- a. Proposed Personal Property Grounds Standards (no objections to proposals below were noted); monthly assessments will be performed by committee.
 - i. Lawn height must not exceed 3 inches.
 - ii. No more than 25% of the lawn may be weeds.
 - iii. Approved grass types are Bermuda and Fescue. Zoysiagrass is unacceptable.
 - iv. Trees that overhang sidewalks, driveways and other areas where cars or pedestrians pass, must be trimmed to a height of 6 feet to allow passage.
 - v. Bushes must be neatly trimmed and shaped. They must not cover more than 30% of home windows.
 - vi. Areas around the base of the home and underneath bushes and trees must be mulched with pine straw or bark chips. Bare spots must comprise no more than 20% of the space. Stone and rubber mulch are to be added to list as acceptable landscape materials.
 - vii. The edge between your landscaping and lawn, and between the sidewalk or street and your lawn must be clearly defined by edging. The lawn should not extend more than 3 inches into the landscaping, street or sidewalk.
- b. Community Garden to be located near Westmoreland Circle; will include fencing and a well. Grounds committee is working with Senior Center and Atlanta Food Bank for support. Plots will be leased on a yearly basis.
- c. Mulching for common areas has been approved by Brock and will occur twice yearly.
- d. Grounds committee to contact MARTA regarding maintenance of their property on Perry; Gas Company will also be contacted regarding property on Johnson Rd.

- e. Request has been made to Boyd Elementary to do clean-up of trash on Johnson Road
- f. Community Cleanup Day was proposed and agreed upon for Saturday, November 9th at 9am. Jackson Bass and Chad Prosser to take planning lead.
- g. Steve Brock suggested that WH should “adopt” an area and post signage stating the area is maintained by the WH HOA.
- h. Advisory Board to look into obtaining WH membership for Atlanta Community Tool-bank.
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VI. Architectural Control Committee Updates

- a. Committee will develop a Design Guideline reference guide in conjunction with Brock; will include paint palette and other architectural component suggestions
- b. Architectural Control Checklist will be developed similar to Grounds checklist to help notify residents of assessments

VII. Communications Committee Updates

- a. Website development is to proceed
- b. Next newsletter to be security issue
- c. Communications committee to provide extra copies of newsletter to Dahlia to distribute to new/incoming residents

VIII. Social Events Updates

- a. House crawl is planned for October 27, starting at 5pm on Habershal. More information to be posted on facebook/google.
- b. NFL game night is planned for Nov. 11th; location TBD
- c. Holiday party to be Dec. 19th; location TBD
- d. LinkedIn West Highlands group has been established

IX. Community Interests Updates

- a. West Highlands Charter School
 - i. Opens in July 2013 and will be a balanced calendar year
 - ii. Will include K-2 in first year; will add one grade per year until K-8 is achieved
 - iii. Will initially be housed at 1903 Drew Dr. and will eventually build a new school in WH
- b. Rand Recycling – Meet the owner Damon Rose
 - i. Currently open for business M-F 8am-4pm
 - ii. Environmental assessment and landscape installation is ongoing
 - iii. Mr. Rose reviewed new law that prevents anyone without an HVAC license from selling copper AC coils
 - iv. Contact: damon@randrecycling.com; 404-831-3114
- c. APS Bus Facility; APS is considering alternate locations
- d. Student Housing Hollywood Rd & Peyton Rd; new construction has been approved for 4 buildings similar to the WestMar Lofts on Marietta.

WEST HIGHLANDS HOA COMMUNITY

West Highlands Homeowners,

You are invited to join our West Highlands Google Group and the Facebook group, forums to exchange ideas and information.

The WH Google Group will also function as a place to announce upcoming events and to view the WH newsletters. By joining the group, you will receive current messages and be able to post messages and questions for the whole neighborhood! You are free to participate in the discussions as much or little as you like.

To become a member of the Google group, visit <http://groups.google.com/group/west-highlands-homeowners> and "Sign in and apply for membership." Please make sure to insert your full name, WH street address and contact telephone number inside the text box when applying to the Group. If you experience any difficulty signing up, please send an email to kimy225@hotmail.com with your email address and

West Highlands in the subject line so an invitation can be directly sent to you.

Another form of communication for the community is Facebook. Please search for "West Highlands Homeowners" and request to be added in the group.



INTRODUCING ProTest SECURITY

As of October 1st of this year, West Highlands HOA has retained ProTest Security as our new on-site security patrol. ProTest replaces GA Traffic Patrol in an effort to provide better coordinated security throughout the entire community. You will find their contact information below in the important numbers section. Services they are providing include:

- * Trained, fully equipped, uniformed security officers
- * Coordination with APD courtesy officers
- * Patrol services
- * Daily logs documenting patrolling activity
- * Marked vehicles

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

City of Atlanta:

Mayor Kaseem Reed (404) 330-6026
Office of Constituent Services

Council Member Felicia Moore (404) 330-6044

Atlanta Fire Department– Station 22 (404) 546-7000
817 Hollywood Road, NW

Atlanta Police Dept– Zone 1 Precinct (404) 799-2487
2315 Donald Lee Hollowell Pkwy

Code Compliance (404) 330-6190

Public Works (street repairs) (404) 330-6333

Sanitation/Solid Waste (404) 330-6333
(household waste and yard trimmings)

Street Right-of-Ways (404) 546-6813

Traffic & Transportation (404) 330-6501
(traffic light and street signs)

Watershed Management (404) 658-6500
(drinking water and waste water)

Fulton County:

Commissioner Emma Darnell (404) 612-8222

Animal Services (404) 613-0358

Street Lights:

Subdivision Street Poles - GA Power (888) 660-5890
(except for light poles in park & along greenway)

Perry Blvd - GA Power (888) 660-5890
(high wooden poles)

Perry Blvd - City of Atlanta (404) 330-6501
(short decorative poles only)

WH Common Areas - Sentry Management (404) 459-8951
(light poles in park and along greenway) Ext. 104

West Highlands Homeowners Association

Management:

Josh Gilmer jgilmer@sentrymgt.com (404) 459-8951
Sentry Management Ext. 104

ProTest Security

ProTest Security (404) 426-6345

Officer Daniel Holcomb
officerholcomb@gmail.com

