

COWELL HOA 2016 SURVEY REPORT

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**RICHARD ELLENSON
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE CHAIR**

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Organization

The Cowell Homeowners Association (CHOA) Board of Directors (BOD) last conducted a survey in the fall of 2009 about Walnut Country’s demographics, facilities, services, and projects (with special consideration given to the smokestack’s removal). Roughly six years later, the BOD conducted another anonymous online survey (with hardcopies available in the CHOA Office) that sought data and homeowners’ thoughts about:

- Demographics;
- Quality of Life at the Crossings;
- Facilities;
- Team Sports Activities;
- CHOA Services and Management; and
- Communications.

Publicizing and Data Quality

The survey was drafted through the CHOA Communications Committee and vetted by the BOD before publication. The survey was publicized for months, and then shared, through the Signal, the eSignal, social media sites (Facebook and Nextdoor), and Walnutcounty.com. The survey was open from January 1 to 22 to homeowners via Surveymonkey.com. Respondents were asked to only be homeowners; however, respondents’ statuses in the community were not verified and repeat entries were only stopped with IP address tracking. With this noted, the BOD firmly believes the great majority of respondents were homeowners.

Number of Respondents

The 2016 survey received 234 respondents for most of the questions, with some questions receiving as few as 208 verified responses. The 2009 survey included as many as 295 responses to some questions. Almost all of the questions in the 2016 survey included the option for open-ended responses; to which 1,548 comments were submitted – all of which were read and sorted for this report. The survey represents roughly 22% of Walnut Country homeowners (out of 1,062 homes) and is considered statistically valid based on the sample size and community population.

Report Contents

This report uses raw data from the survey, often with simple percentages and rating scale averages to summarize results with some general conclusions added. As applicable, significantly popular open-ended comment trends are also included when summarizing “Respondent Comments”. Finally, data from the 2009 survey is compared when possible.

The terms “respondent” and “homeowner” are used interchangeably in this report, even as a small portion of respondents identified themselves as renters (4.7%) and not homeowners. Generalizations made about the community in this report, and written as such, are only based on survey results and may not necessarily represent the community as a whole.

Survey’s Impact to BOD Decisions

As mentioned in nearly all survey advertisements and several times in the survey itself, the survey results neither mean nor require the BOD to eliminate or immediately add activities or facilities, or make policy changes. The data will only aid the BOD when considering how to better serve the community, and not entirely decide how to move forward.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Demographics and Quality of Life

A great majority of respondents (96%) are at least “moderately proud” to live in the Crossings with 75% “very proud” or “extremely proud”; 87% of respondents also want to live here five years from now. Compared to the last survey, the community is becoming younger with 49% of respondents having at least one child less than 18 years old compared to 40% in 2009; even as the average respondent has lived here for 17 years. The average income for homeowners has also increased with 79% reporting (33 chose not to answer) an income of at least \$100,000; an increase from 60% in 2009.

Facilities and BOD Management

When asked how important CHOA facilities are, respondents reiterated the findings in 2009 that the BOD’s concentration on the quality of the Greenbelt, CHOA Business Office, Clubhouse, and pools is in line with homeowners’ wishes. Many comments championed continued landscaping work on the Greenbelt; the most used and most important facility. Other facilities may not have been used as much, but respondents rated them important mostly for the value they provide to the community and home prices.

When possible future projects were asked, the top three responses were replacing access keys with electronic cards (the only answer rated higher than “Very Interested”), sunshades on playgrounds, and turning the business office into an exercise gym. The gym was the least used facility, but the fourth most important facility.

Team Activities

The majority of homeowners (62%) support the exclusive use of facilities by the Walnut Country Swim Team (WCST) and United States Tennis Association (USTA) teams, as long as monthly HOA dues are not increased to make up any losses that these teams may incur (70% against). Also, a simple majority (46%) of respondents said that they agreed with the 49% cap of non-residents swimming for WCST at our facilities.

CHOA Services and BOD Management

The survey showed that landscaping and architecture rules enforcement are, by far, the most important services that the CHOA Board offers homeowners; however, architecture rules enforcement was rated “somewhat satisfied” and landscaping enforcement was rated “satisfied”. Rounding out the list of services rated “Very Important” were: security patrols, the property manager, recreation staff, and social events.

Safety and crime prevention are very important to respondents with a great interest in Neighborhood Watch and Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) programs. Social events have also climbed to the sixth (out of 12) most important service, jumping from the least important service (out of 10) in the 2009 survey.

Communications

The majority of homeowners (80%) were satisfied with the BOD’s communication of monthly meetings and community news; however, as 75% of respondents have never attended a BOD or CHOA Committee meeting, greater publicity for these events is always welcome. Also, some respondents said they were unaware of online communication channels and some social events throughout the year – a problem that would be rectified with greater communication and better publicizing of communication channels.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Results

Many homeowners in Walnut Country have been here for a long time, with an average time spent living here of a little more than 17 years; with 36% of respondents living here for 10 years or less. The 2009 survey did not ask how long a respondent lived in the community.

The average number of residents per household is 3.2 with 38% of homes having no more than two residents; a 2% increase compared to the 2009 survey. Of note is that of the 145 homes with more than two residents, the average occupancy is more than four residents; indicating a greater concentration of families in the community than 2009. Further, 185 homes or 79%, contain less than two people under the age of 65.

More than 49% of respondents have at least one child less than 18 years old; a significant change from the 2009 survey in which 40% of respondents had children in this age group. Children in the Crossings are equally represented across age groups with 189 0-5 year olds, 181 6-12 year olds, and 185 13-18 year olds. These equal age group totals imply that the community’s public schools (Highland Elementary, Foothills Middle School, and Northgate High School or Clayton Valley Charter High School) at all levels will continue to be important to our residents.

The community’s average income increased as 79% of households (that chose to provide an answer) earning at least \$100,000 compared to 60% in 2009. Finally, the top six streets responding to the survey accounted for more than 28% of all respondents.

Street	# of Respondents	Percent
Sweetbriar Court	11	4.7
Sugarland Court	11	4.7
Catalpa Court	8	3.8
Sugar Maple Court	8	3.8
Leatherwood Court	8	3.8
Silverberry Court	8	3.8
Weeping Spruce Court	8	3.8

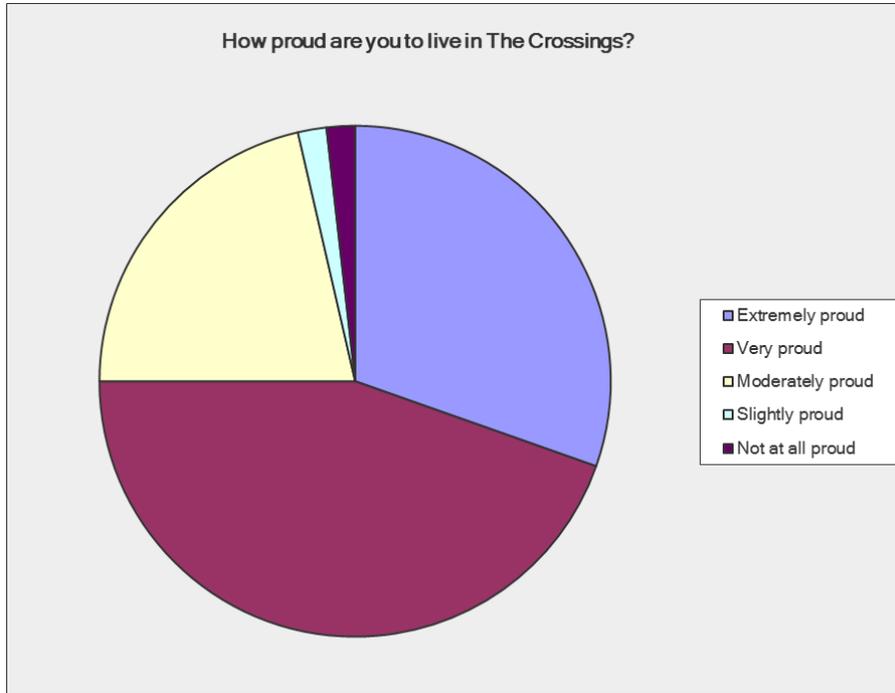
Respondent Comments

Demographic questions did not include open-ended comments.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Results

A whopping 75% of residents are “very proud” or “extremely proud” to live in the Crossings with 96% of respondents at least “moderately proud” to call our community home. The more proud our residents are, the more everyone will have a hand in keeping this community a great place to live. Further, 87% of respondents want to continue living in the Crossings five years from today.



Respondents were also asked how important the following factors were in their decision to live in the Crossings. Each answer was worth 1 to 4 points from “Not Important” to “Very Important”.

How Important are the following in your decision to live in the Crossings?	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Rating Average
Neighborhood (ex: safe for kids, quiet, most streets are courts)	5	9	58	156	3.60
Quality of Schools	19	12	63	134	3.37
CHOA Facilities and Services	9	30	96	93	3.20
HOA Dues (among the lowest in the area)	18	33	76	101	3.14
Location	7	44	101	76	3.08
Affordable Housing	24	38	105	61	2.89

Respondent Comments

The great majority of respondents said they enjoy Walnut Country for its sense of community, amenities, good schools, and low HOA dues. Many comments celebrated having the Greenbelt as a compromise for smaller yards. When asked what would cause them to move out, comments were split among crime increases, poor HOA rules enforcement, job changes, and decreased personal health.

FACILITIES

Results

When asked how important specific CHOA facilities are, respondents reiterated the findings in 2009 that the Board’s concentration on the quality of the Greenbelt, CHOA Business Office, Clubhouse, and pools is in line with homeowners’ wishes. Respondents rated facilities from 1 “Not Important” to 5 “Extremely Important”. Answers for usage included “Never” (1 point), “Yearly” (2), “Monthly” (3), “Weekly” (4), and “Daily” (5). Ratings from the 2009 survey are included in this chart to understand the priorities back then, but the scoring system was different than the 2016 survey.

Importance ratings did not always match Usage ratings which shows that such facilities are valued by homeowners, even though they may not use them often. For example, the Clubhouse is the third most important facility, but respondents on average visited it once per year. Low usage does not mean low value. Conversely, while homeowners may not think that the playgrounds are very important, they are the third-most used facility. However, when importance and usage averages are combined, the Greenbelt is far and away the most important and most used facility in the Crossings.

The two facilities that were the least used were the Clubhouse Gym (1.35) and Tennis Backboard (1.54). However, the Clubhouse Gym’s importance has increased since 2009 which suggests (and reflected in comments) that homeowners want it improved which would increase how often it is used.

How important are these facilities? How often does a member of your household use these facilities (when open)?	2016 Importance Average	2009 Importance Rating* (rank)	2016 Usage Average (rank)	2016 Importance + Usage Averages
Greenbelt	4.17	4.48 (1)	4.30 (1)	8.47
CHOA Business Office	3.52		1.94 (9)	5.46
Clubhouse – Overall Facility	3.42	3.39 (4)	2.53 (4)	5.95
Clubhouse Gym	3.32	2.19 (12)	1.35 (14)	4.67
Clubhouse Game Area	3.28	2.44 (10)	1.93 (11)	5.21
Main Swimming Pool	3.19	4.16 (2)	2.80 (2)	5.99
East Swimming Pool	2.84		2.42 (5)	5.26
West Swimming Pool	2.84		2.41 (6)	5.25
Tennis Courts	2.78	3.06 (5)	1.82 (12)	4.60
Tennis Backboard	2.70	2.52 (8)	1.54 (13)	4.24
Playgrounds	2.52	3.47 (3)	2.58 (3)	5.10
Basketball Courts	2.37	2.22 (11)	2.03 (8)	4.40
Dog Park	2.32	2.70 (7)	2.19 (7)	4.51
Picnic Areas	2.31	3.00 (6)	1.94 (9)	4.25
Smokestack Memorial	1.90	2.49 (9)	N/A	N/A

* The 2009 survey rating system was different than the 2016 survey rating system, but the 2009 rankings still reflect their importance at that time.

When asked about possible projects and facility changes that the CHOA Board was considering, with choices ranging from 0 points for “Not Interested” to 5 points for “Extremely Interested”, the top three responses were replacing access keys with electronic cards (the only answer that rated higher than “Very Interested”), sunshades on playgrounds, and turning the CHOA business office into a gym. The least interested facility changes were adding a Pickleball Court and running a Private BART Shuttle.

How interested is your household in the facility ideas below?	Rating Average
Replace Access Keys with Electronic Cards	3.20
Sunshades over Main and East Playground Structures	2.95
Turn Business Office into an Exercise Gym	2.77
Additional Benches/Picnic Areas on Greenbelt	2.71
Upgrades (ex. swings) to East Playground (located toward Ayers Road)	2.70
Spa or Hot Tub at Main Pool	2.70
Solar Panels for Clubhouse and Pool	2.68
Bocce Courts	2.64
Keep Main Pool Open and Heated Year Round	2.63
Extend Gym Hours (ex: morning)	2.50
Basketball Court Lights	2.42
Community Garden	2.36
Private BART Shuttle	2.00
Make One Tennis Court into a Pickleball Court	1.83

Respondent Comments

Many respondents said that while they rarely used some facilities, they recognized the importance of having the facilities to encourage a sense of community and as a selling point for home prices. When asked what it would take to increase facility use, responses were split as they were in the ratings with several requests for brighter Greenbelt lighting. Several homeowners said that spending money is okay as long as it directly improves the quality of life at the Crossings and keeps facilities up to date.

TEAM ACTIVITIES

Results

The majority of homeowners (62%) support the exclusive use of facilities by the WCST and USTA as long as monthly HOA dues are not increased to make up any losses that these teams may incur (70% against). Also, a simple majority (46%) of respondents said that they agreed with the 49% cap of non-residents swimming for WCST at our facilities.

Respondent Comments

The majority of homeowners were in favor of the teams using the facilities as long as the teams pay their share of the maintenance and “wear and tear” cost. Many respondents acknowledged the BOD’s challenge of supporting community activities while balancing the fiduciary needs of those who do not take advantage.

CHOA SERVICES AND MANAGEMENT

Results

Respondents were either “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with how the CHOA Board is managing: the Greenbelt landscape during this drought season, the sidewalks and walkways, and the swimming pools. However, respondents were only “Somewhat Satisfied” with the Board’s management of “Tennis Courts/Lights”. It should be noted “Tennis Court/Lights” also had 73 “No Opinion” entries, or four times as many “No Opinions” as the other items combined.

The survey showed that landscaping and architecture rules enforcement are, by far, the most important services that the CHOA Board offers homeowners. Rounding out the list of “Very Important” services were: security patrols, the property manager, recreation staff, and social events. All of these services are rated high because they impact the greatest amount of homeowners throughout the year and are not seasonal activities.

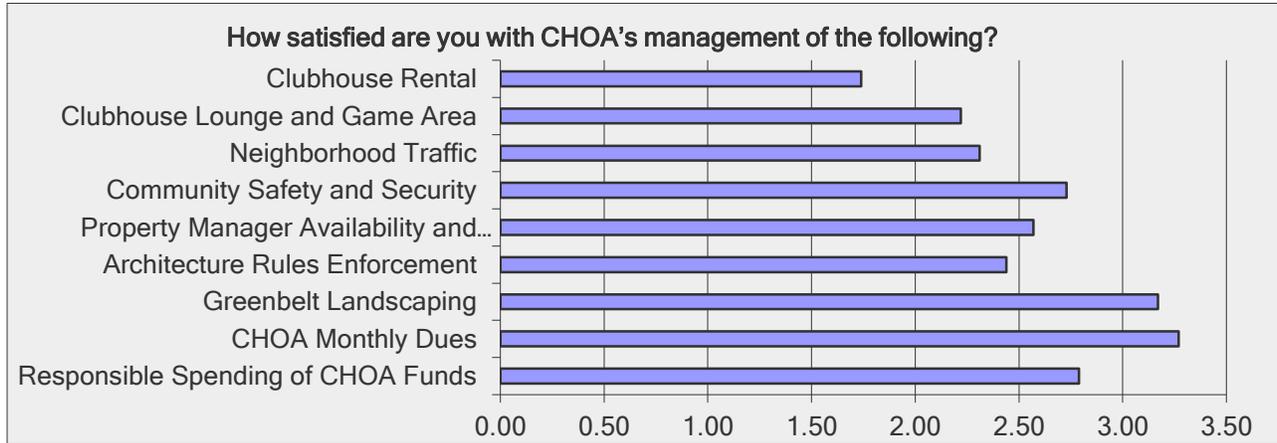
Compared to 2009, the top priorities remained the same while “Social Events” went from the least important in 2009 to the sixth most important service in 2016; much credit goes to the Activities Committee expanding the number of events and improving their quality. Also, some services remained low including T-ball, youth soccer/sports, and the tennis pro.

How important are these CHOA services to your household?	2016 Rating Average	2009 Ratings (rank)*
Landscaping Service	4.05	4.15 (2)
Architectural Rules Enforcement	3.89	N/A
Nightly Security Patrols	3.35	4.22 (1)
On-site Property Manager	3.30	3.59 (3)
Recreation/Clubhouse Staff	3.21	3.23 (4)
Social Events (ex: Back to School BBQ, senior pot luck, Winter Holiday Party)	2.99	**2.18 (10)
Preschool	2.97	2.76 (7)
Swim Team (WCST)	2.71	2.86 (5)
Swim Lessons	2.62	2.77 (6)
T-ball and Youth Soccer	2.58	2.56 (8)
USTA Tennis Teams	2.31	N/A
Tennis Pro	2.28	2.33 (9)

* The 2009 survey rating system was different than the 2016 survey rating system, but the 2009 rankings still reflect their importance at that time.

** The 2009 survey only rated the Spring Egg Hunt and Haunted House in 2009.

The survey also showed that homeowners were satisfied with the CHOA BOD’s management of the Greenbelt and other shared grounds. However, while architecture rules enforcement is a high priority for homeowners, they are not as satisfied with the management of those rules rating it “Somewhat Satisfied”. Items in the chart below were rated on a scale of: 0-No Opinion, 1-Dissatisfied, 2-Somewhat Satisfied, 3-Satisfied, or 4-Very Satisfied.



While many respondents (159 out of 209) did not have any interest in new activities in the Clubhouse such as martial arts, a billiards tournament, a ping pong tournament, or shuffleboard tournament, more than half said they would be interested in a Neighborhood Watch presentation and a CERT class. This interest, combined with nightly security patrols that ranked as the third-most important service provided to the community, clearly demonstrates that safety is of great importance in the Crossings.

When asked about ever attending a CHOA Board or Committee meeting, a great majority of homeowners (75% on average) have never attended a meeting of any kind, many of whom said they simply did not have a need to attend.

As noted earlier, the Activities Committee has expanded the number of CHOA events throughout the year. In the last three years, 50% of the respondents either attended an event or wanted to, 46% said they had no interest, and 4% said they were unaware – something that needs to improve through CHOA’s communications.

Respondent Comments

In addition to echoing the results above, the majority of homeowners said they are happy with how the community is managed by the BOD which is why they have not felt a need to attend, but if they had to attend a meeting it would help to schedule them at other times and days of the week. Some respondents said they simply do not have the time to attend. Several respondents suggested a community walking group, social events for teenagers, and having monthly “general interest” lectures.

COMMUNICATIONS

Results

In general homeowners are aware of and using the many communication avenues available to them to find out about the community. The vast majority of homeowners (80%) are “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with CHOA’s communication of community news, social events, and Board and committee meetings.

Though the community social media sites (Facebook and Nextdoor) are neither owned nor managed by CHOA, it would only help the community if more people were aware of their offerings. As it is, 62% of respondents were satisfied with the BOD’s use of these sites; a value that goes up to 95% for those who use the sites (discarding “No Opinion”). Of the three avenues wholly owned and controlled by the BOD (Signal, eSignal, and website), the Signal is used by 94.7% of respondents, while the eSignal and website are both used by 68.8% of respondents.

Are you using the following CHOA publications or social media sites?	Didn't Know it Existed	I Know of it, but don't use it	Use it
Signal Newsletter	3 (1.4%)	8 (3.8%)	197 (94.7%)
eSignal Email Newsletter	24 (11.5%)	41 (19.7%)	143 (68.8%)
The Crossings’ web site (WalnutCountry.com)	9 (4.3%)	55 (26.4%)	144 (69.2%)
Facebook Site Managed by Claycord.com	46 (22.1%)	83 (39.9%)	79 (38.0%)
Nextdoor.com (Neighborhood Online Bulletin Board)	43 (20.7%)	51 (24.5%)	114 (54.8%)

Respondent Comments

In addition to the results above, homeowners asked for or looked forward to the redesigned website. They also wanted to see more publicity of meeting agendas/minutes and more information on the online community calendar.